



Education, Leisure & Lifelong Learning Service
Strategic School Improvement Programme

FUTURE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE UPPER AFAN VALLEY

CONSULTATION REPORT

Contents

| | Page |
|--------------------------------------------------|------|
| 1. Introduction..... | 3 |
| 2. Context..... | 3 |
| 3. Background..... | 4 |
| 4. Consultation process..... | 6 |
| 5. Consultation meetings..... | 7 |
| 6. Consultation responses..... | 8 |
| 7. Summary of comments received..... | 10 |
| 8. Education..... | 23 |
| 9. Federation..... | 32 |
| 10. Transport and travel..... | 34 |
| 11. 21 st century build projects..... | 46 |
| 12. Building condition and size..... | 50 |
| 13. Wider community..... | 52 |
| 14. Consultation quality..... | 56 |
| 15. Finance..... | 62 |
| 16. Alternative school organisation..... | 65 |
| 17. The next step..... | 89 |
| 18. Appendices..... | 90 |

Response to consultation on the future of secondary education in the upper Afan Valley - analysis and comments

1. Introduction

This consultation report summarises the issues raised by consultees during the consultation process. It responds to these by means of clarification and commentary, with supporting reasons. The issues arising from the consultations have been responded to under nine main themes: education; federation; transport; 21st century build projects; building condition and size; wider community; consultation quality; finance and alternative school organisation.

Many of the responses relate to pupil well-being, pupil safety and pupil welfare and to the benefits to pupils of receiving their secondary education in the upper Afan Valley. These issues are addressed within the main themes and include the views of the children & young people.

The view of Estyn, the schools' inspectorate, is included in this consultation report together with notes of meetings with key stakeholders.

This report needs to be read alongside the consultation document¹, 'The future of secondary education in the upper Afan Valley'

2. Context

The Council has consulted with interested parties on the future of secondary education in the upper Afan Valley. The proposal consulted upon seeks to make arrangements for pupils who would otherwise attend Cymer Afan Comprehensive school to receive their secondary education at a new build school in Margam, Ysgol Cwm Brombil. If implemented, this proposal would take effect on 1st September 2019 with Cymer Afan Comprehensive school closing on 31st August 2019.

¹ Consultation document - <https://www.npt.gov.uk/1891>

3. Background

The Council is responsible for promoting high educational standards and for delivering efficient primary and secondary education. Having the right schools in the right place and ensuring that they are fit for the 21st century learner is the challenge facing the Council. Achieving this will involve reviewing the number and type of schools the Council has in its area and assessing whether or not best use is being made of resources and facilities.

Implementing the Council's Strategic School Improvement Programme (SSIP) involves reviewing existing provision and determining the number and type of schools needed to deliver education effectively and efficiently across the County Borough. It will most likely lead to substantial change involving opening new schools, closing existing schools, merging or amalgamating schools, federating schools and promoting new initiatives that support collaborative working between schools.

The Council has determined to review its provision on the basis of:

- educational standards
- the need for places and the accessibility of schools
- the quality and suitability of school accommodation
- effective financial management

Secondary education in the upper Afan Valley is provided at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school as part of a federation of five schools, four primary and one secondary.

Cymer Afan Comprehensive is a small secondary school² with 229³ pupils on roll. Pupil numbers are not forecasted to increase sufficiently to change its small secondary school status. Cymer Afan Comprehensive school building has significant surplus places. It has capacity for 641 pupils but with 229 pupils on roll it is carrying 64% surplus capacity.

² A school with 600 pupils or fewer is generally regarded as a small secondary school - Estyn 2013: 'School Size and Education Effectiveness'

³ School Census January 2018

At £7,111⁴, 'per pupil' funding at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school during the 2017/18 financial year was significantly higher (approx. 60%) than the average for the Council's schools; equal to c.£2,600 extra for each pupil or an additional c.£595k allocated to the schools budget share. The average for a secondary sector school in Neath Port Talbot was £4,476 whilst the lowest was £3,910. In the current financial year⁵, pupils at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school receive £6,822 per pupil compared to the average for other secondary schools of £4,245, a difference of £2,577 which remains approx. 60% above the average.

Cymer Afan Comprehensive school has backlog maintenance and accessibility costs amounting to c.£3m. The site is assessed as overall condition C, with many of the building and mechanical elements nearing the end of their life span.

There will be suitable, alternative English-medium provision available at Ysgol Cwm Brombil, which will offer a new build 21st century school. There is also suitable English-medium provision at Cefn Saeson Comprehensive school and Maesteg Comprehensive school.

The Council is proposing to make arrangements for pupils from the upper Afan Valley to receive their secondary education at Ysgol Cwm Brombil, a £30m investment by the Council in a new build school with 21st century school facilities.

Pupils' attainment and achievement improve in new build schools and improvements in the quality of buildings have a positive effect on the quality of teaching and staff morale, which in turn further impacts on pupil performance. Staff in new build schools in Neath Port Talbot confirm this view and report improvements in aspects such as pupil behaviour, attendance and wellbeing.

Where a Council proposes the closure of a school it is required to consult before taking a decision on whether or not to implement that proposal. Consultation on this proposal has shown high levels of support to retain secondary education in the upper Afan Valley.

⁴ School budget share allocation 2017/2018

⁵ School budget share allocation 2018.19

4. Consultation process

On 9th November 2017, the Council's Education, Skills and Culture Cabinet board determined to consult on the future of education in the upper Afan Valley. The consultation period ran from 11th December 2017 to 14th February 2018. A list of consultees is included at Appendix A. The consultation document⁶ was made available by e-mail to consultees, with the school managing distribution to parents and pupils. It was also available on the Council's website. Cymer Afan Comprehensive school agreed to place the document on the federated schools' websites. Hard copies were available on request.

A pupil version of the consultation document was also made available to the school to distribute as it felt appropriate.

The consultation document invited views and opinions to be submitted in respect of the proposal. The Welsh Government's School Organisation Code requires the Council to consult on its proposal and to publish a consultation report summarising any issues raised by consultees, the Council's response to those issues and Estyn's view of the overall merit of the proposal.

The proposal and the consultation report will be considered by elected Members of the Council and should it be agreed to proceed with the plans consulted upon then the next stage of the process will be to publish a statutory notice outlining the proposal. This would be published for a period of 28 days during which written objections may be submitted.

Where objections are received, an objection report will be published summarising the objections and the Council's response to those objections. Elected Members of the Council will consider the proposal in light of objections received when taking a decision as to whether or not the proposal is to be implemented.

⁶ Consultation document - <https://www.npt.gov.uk/media/8363/future-of-secondary-education-in-the-upper-afan-valley-consultation-document.pdf>

5. Consultation meetings

Although not a formal requirement, during the consultation period meetings were held with key stakeholder groups to hear, in person, their views on the Council's proposal. Meetings were held with:

School Staff (Federated Schools of the upper Afan Valley), 17th January 2018, 3.45 p.m. at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school. Notes of the comments made and officer responses given at the meeting are included at Appendix B.

Governing Body (Federated Schools of the upper Afan Valley), 17th January 2018, 5.30 p.m. at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school. Notes of the comments made and officer responses given at the meeting are included at Appendix C.

Parents/carers (Federated Schools of the upper Afan Valley), 18th January 2018, 5.00 p.m. at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school. Notes of the comments made and officer responses given at the meeting are included at Appendix D.

Pupils (Federated Schools of the upper Afan Valley), 26th January 2018, 9.00 a.m. at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school. Notes of the comments made and officer responses given at the meeting are included at Appendix E.

Temporary Governing Body, Ysgol Cwm Brombil, 29th January 2018, 5.15 p.m. at St David's Church Hall, Margam. Notes of the comments made and officer responses given at the meeting are included at Appendix F.

Communities of the upper Afan Valley, 5th February 2018, 6.00 p.m. at Cymer Afan Comprehensive. Notes of the comments made and officer responses are included at Appendix G.

It should be recognised that the notes of the meetings reflect the officers' understanding of the views expressed and, as such, may not wholly capture the substance of individual comments made and queries raised. In this

respect and to support the consultation process, at each meeting consultees were encouraged to submit their comments in writing.

6. Consultation Responses

Although a count of the responses is shown below, no particular weight is given to the number received as it is the views expressed and issues raised which informed this consultation report. A total of 3137 written responses were received.

Of these, a total of 943 pro forma comment forms were received; these are the forms provided with the consultation document. Table 1 below shows how the respondents using the pro forma identified themselves and the respective number of forms received. Many respondents submitted more than one comment form, some with different comments.

Table 1

| | | | |
|-------------------|-----|-------------|-----|
| Pupils | 38 | Residents | 104 |
| Parents/Carers | 284 | Past pupils | 117 |
| Staff | 11 | Others | 103 |
| Governors | 6 | Unspecified | 59 |
| Pupils' relatives | 221 | | |

In addition to the pro forma comment forms, 2194 letters were received.

1916 of these comprised multiple copies of 8 standardised letters, with many respondents signing each of the 8 standardised letters.

Table 2

| | | | |
|--------------------------|-----|--------------------------|-----|
| Standardised letter No.1 | 27 | Standardised letter No.5 | 359 |
| Standardised letter No.2 | 361 | Standardised letter No.6 | 361 |
| Standardised letter No.3 | 357 | Standardised letter No.7 | 74 |
| Standardised letter No.4 | 363 | Standardised letter No.8 | 14 |

278 comprised individual letters or emails. Table 3 and table 4 below shows how the respondents identified themselves and the respective number of hard copy letters/e-mails received

Table 3

| | | | |
|----------------|----|-------------------|----|
| Pupils | 93 | Pupils' relatives | 12 |
| Parents/Carers | 39 | Residents | 42 |
| Staff | 30 | Past pupils | 25 |
| Governors | 6 | Unspecified | 16 |

15 individual letters were also received from the following respondents.

Table 4

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Estyn | Trade Unions x 3 (NASUWT, Unison, National Education Union Cymru) |
| Upper Afan Valley Federation of Schools Governing Body | Cllr Scott Jones (x 2) and Cllr Ralph Thomas |
| Afan Federation Support and Action Group x3 | Stephen Kinnock MP |
| Cymmer Afan Community Library | David Rees AM |
| Afan Valley Community Leisure | Bethan Jenkins AM |

Copies of all written responses will be made available to Members prior to the meeting of the Council's Cabinet at which the proposal and consultation report will be considered.

The Council is aware of an online petition against the closure of Cymer Afan Comprehensive school which has in excess of 1500 signatures.

7. Summary of comments received

Comments received relate to the following themes

Table 5

| | |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Transport and travel | Community |
| Education | Consultation processes |
| Federation | Finance |
| 21 st century school projects | Alternative organisation arrangements |
| Building and building conditions | |

In order to reflect the sentiment and feelings expressed by respondents, extracts from the responses to the consultation are included below. These are a sample of the views expressed. Individual concerns and queries have been addressed either directly or indirectly in the officer response to each of the main themes arising from the consultation.

Education

- *“Cymer Afan is a special school that provides pupils with the most wonderful experiences.”*
- *“Why close a school that is the 6th best in Wales and better than all other schools in Neath Port Talbot?”*
- *“Where is the evidence that this is an opportunity to improve learning outcomes?”*
- *“Cymer Afan has a reputation for caring and nurturing pupils?”*
- *“As you are aware the local authority produce a Vulnerability Assessment Profile (VAP) on all pupils within Neath Port Talbot, points being given if pupils receive free school meals, are SEN, each time they move school etc. Cymer Afan Comprehensive score the highest out of all mainstream schools and are therefore according to LA data already the most vulnerable pupils in the whole of Neath Port Talbot. This rating will increase even further if the proposal to close the school goes ahead due to the additional school move. This again shows how our pupils will be disadvantaged, and this proposal is not in their best interest and wellbeing.”*

- *“ALN pupils are thriving in their surroundings of a main stream school. This would not be possible for them in Margam, it is only possible because of the excellent working relationship we have with each and every one of them.”*
- *“Why close a school that provides so much for the deprived, pupils with Emotional Social and Behavioural difficulties and SEN children?”*
- *“Is the standard of provision for SEN in Ysgol Cwm Brombil as good as that in Cymer Afan Comprehensive School? Will pupils have the same entitlement? Will they have the POD provision?”*
- *“Are you aware that we practice on a “person centred” approach in Wales, has this approach been taken here?”*
- *“Local Port Talbot pupils may not accept the upper Afan Valley pupils.”*
- *“How can you make sure pupils are safe in a school they don’t belong in?”*
- *“Why is there no cross county border co-operation, with the LEAs, to increase pupil numbers in Cymer Comprehensive?”*
- *“Research shows that small schools consistently outperform large ones.”*
- *“Estyn report that small schools are better in deprived areas.”*
- *“Will my child be more likely to be bullied in a larger school?”*
- *“The proposal to close the school also fails to consider the disruption to learners, particularly to those currently in Year 9.”*
- *“Can you ensure that the children will not be singled out or at a disadvantage where their work is concerned?”*
- *“What effect is the vertical curriculum going to have on pupils if they move to schools that don’t offer it?”*
- *“Longer distances to travel will lead to greater absenteeism - How can you ensure this will not have a detrimental impact on children’s education?”*
- *“Children in Cymer Afan Comprehensive have access to sporting facilities and swimming, will these activities cease in the new school?”*
- *“What will be put in place to ensure support staff are employed if the school closes?”*

Federation

- *“Expertise of the secondary school teachers would not be available for the primary pupils if the school closed so primary children would lose out under this proposal?”*
- *“The current (federation) model allows the staff to build successful relationships with pupils and their families”*

- *“Effective transition between key stage 2 and key stage 3 will be undermined and progress in raising standards will be impacted.”*
- *“What guarantees can you give that the primary schools will remain open?”*
- *“Why is the Council going against promises to keep the federation for 10 years?”*

Transport and travel

- *“The proposal to commute our children from their villages for up to 2 hours per day is completely unsatisfactory.”*
- *“Isn’t it the responsibility of the LEA to provide suitable educational provision for pupils within their own county at a reasonable travelling distance?”*
- *“What are the details of the trial run conducted by the Council which is claimed takes 45 minutes from the Afan Valley to Margam?”*
- *“How long will it be before parents are asked to contribute to the cost of transport?”*
- *“Has a full travel assessment taken place?”*
- *“What are the arrangements for buses at Ysgol Cwm Brombil?”*
- *“Will shelters be provided at each of the bus stops?”*
- *It is not the length of the journey which will be to the detriment of pupils but the time spent on the bus and the behaviour, well-being and safety concerns that entails.”*
- *“How can you ensure the safety of pupils?”*
- *“Will there be an adult escort on the bus?”*
- *“It is a fact that bullying will occur on buses and a longer journey will increase this. “*
- *“What if the bus breaks down on the way to/from school?”*
- *“What are the Council’s policies and procedures regarding the safety of a child on school transport if there are dangerous conditions?”*
- *“No account has been taken of the daily risks travelling the valley roads and motorway”*
- *“A majority of people in the Afan Valley either do not drive or do not have access to a car – how do they get their child to school if they miss the bus?”*
- *“What about proposed attendance fines?”*
- *“Most parents in the area don’t have spare cash lying around to ferry their children back and forth on the public bus (or extortionate taxi fares).”*

- *“It will take up to two hours to travel from the Afan Valley to Margam, via public transport following many connections that would be made during the journey.”*
- *“Pupils from Glyncoerwg, Croeserw and Abercregan will have to get three (public transport) buses if they miss the school bus.”*
- *“What will you do to ensure that every child from this valley will be safe if they miss a bus and can’t get home?”*
- *“How are pupils from the upper Afan Valley going to be able to take part in after school activities? Will extra buses be provided for this?”*
- *“How will children get to school if they have a medical appointment?”*
- *“How will parents/carers/grandparents get to school if a pupil needs to be collected early due to illness or accident?”*
- *“How can parents attend parents evening if they don’t drive? Would transport costs (for parents) be paid for by the school?”*
- *“What will happen when transport fails?”*
- *“What will happen to pupils if it snows – how will they get home from school?”*
- *“All valley pupils would need to rise much earlier each morning to travel such a distance.”*
- *“What are the loading times for each set of children?”*
- *“Are the children going to have to walk a fair distance to catch the bus at ungodly hour’s morning and night when it’s dark, bitterly cold and raining?”*
- *“How will children have time for a social life due to extra hours travelling?”*
- *“What will be done to support ALN pupils who cannot travel on buses due to their anxiety levels?”*
- *“Research has proven that lengthy commutes will have a negative impact on pupils’ health and well-being.”*
- *“What impact assessments were carried out on the effect of such considerable travel times on the well-being of children and families?”*
- *“What are the health implications for pupils travelling from upper Afan Valley to Margam daily?”*
- *“Travelling by bus rather than walking or cycling as the pupils do now will increase obesity which is against the Well-being of Future Generations Act.”*
- *“This proposal would remove the opportunity for pupils to walk or cycle to school, reducing their ability to lead healthy, active and safer lifestyles.”*
- *“Extra traffic will increase pollution.”*

- *“These (travel arrangements) are the responsibility of the school and the LEA (ref DofE – New Home school travel and transport guidance)”*

21st Century School Projects

- *“Why can’t Cymer have a new build school?”*
- *“Why should the children from the upper Afan Valley be treated any differently from any other child? Isn’t 2018 the year of equality?”*
- *“New buildings don’t produce better results”*
- *“What evidence is there that new schools have better outcomes?”*
- *“If pupil costs are so much higher for Cymer Afan than elsewhere in the local authority, why wasn’t this thought of sooner and a new build school located somewhere more central (for the Afan Valley and Margam), e.g. Cwmafan?”*
- *“Wouldn’t a merger between Cefn Saeson and Cymer Afan be a better option?”*
- *“Close Cefn Saeson and transport those pupils to our school?”*
- *“Have the local residents been made aware if the closure of Cymer Afan does go ahead that there would be an extra five buses travelling through the estate twice a day?”*
- *“Why was Ysgol Cwm Brombil built too large for the current catchment area?”*
- *“Who will fill the surplus places if not Cymer Afan pupils?”*
- *“What if pupil numbers fluctuate (in the valley) and there isn’t enough room for pupils in the new school?”*
- *“Why have other feeder schools of slightly smaller size (Eastern Primary and Coed Hirwaun Primary) been dismissed to join Ysgol Cwm Brombil instead of Cymer Afan Comprehensive?”*
- *“As parents from the Cymmer region will be in a minority at Margam, it will prove more difficult for them to be elected as members of the Governing Body and to champion the rights of valley pupils.”*
- *“You have not even tried to get funding from the Welsh Assembly for a new school, everyone else is having it so why can’t we?”*

Building and building condition

- *“How is the £3m figure for repairs at Cymer Afan calculated?”*
- *“Ysgol Cwm Brombil is costing £30 million so why is there such controversy over a £3million revamp for Cymer Afan?”*

- *“What are the reasons for Cefn Saeson being granted a new school build?”*
- *“Why hasn’t the council carried out essential repairs to Cymer Afan Comprehensive?”*
- *“Why is it only now that we are being made aware of such huge repair costs?”*
- *“What is the Valley Task Force money funding- why can’t it be used for the up keep of the building?”*
- *“Will there be a cost to maintain/secure the site should it close?”*
- *“What is the cost of demolishing the building?”*
- *“Claims that the school (Cymer Afan Comprehensive) has an extra 400 surplus places has been exaggerated by the Council to suit the needs of its agenda.”*

Wider Community

- *“Cymer Afan Comprehensive plays a key role in the life of the valley.”*
- *“And so the challenge of this consultation is to find an affordable solution which meets the educational needs of the pupils **and** wider interests of the communities of the upper Afan Valley.”*
- *“Who would buy a house in an area with no school?”*
- *“Cymer Afan Comprehensive is the biggest employer in the area – is it fair to take this away from us?”*
- *“What is going to happen to local businesses?”*
- *“Cymer Afan is a rural school and is protected from closure.”*
- *“Closure would mean isolating the upper Afan Valley from other parts of Neath Port Talbot... resulting in greater unemployment and deprivation.”*
- *“The community impact assessment is flawed in that it fails to examine the long term consequences of school closure on already deprived valley villages.”*
- *“By removing education from the valley NPTCBC would be signalling their abandonment of a vulnerable community.”*
- *“How does closing the school fit with the Valleys Taskforce Strategy?”*
- *“School closure at this time would undermine the £130million ‘Afan Valley Adventure Park’ proposals and make the area less attractive to developers Northern Power.”*
- *“Is the proposed closure because the (school) land has been sold to make way for the infrastructure of the development?”*

- *“Why can’t there be a reprieve to see how things develop with the proposed new leisure park at Cymmer and the possibility of the Rhondda Tunnel being reopened, both of which could act as catalysts to encourage new housing development and an increase in population?”*
- *“Are projected pupil figures taking into account a potential increase due to the resort?”*
- *“Why cannot the adventure park work alongside Cymer Afan Comprehensive School to provide local school leavers to apply for apprenticeships or jobs at the adventure park?”*
- *“Why has it not been proposed for the school to gain funding from the adventure park for its £3million repair bill?”*

Consultation quality

- *“The Council has been acting in bad faith in bringing forward proposals to Close Cymer Afan comprehensive”*
- *“Why has the consultation with parents and community been so short?”*
- *“The consultation concentrates on educational provision at the expense of a broader, more holistic approach which would consider the overall impact of any decisions taken not just on educational standards and costs but on the wider community as a whole.”*
- *“Have all necessary bodies received a copy of the consultation process/proposal?”*
- *“The consultation document is littered with profession terminology and jargon which is not readily understood by non-education professionals.”*
- *“The tone of the writing (within the Consultation Document) fails to uphold impartiality with greater positive emphasis laid upon, for example, the achievements of Dyffryn School and little mention made of those of Cymer Afan.”*
- *“Extra-curricular activities (for Cymer Afan Comprehensive) have not been mentioned in the consultation papers, whereas they have been for other schools.”*
- *“There are many failings in this consultation process where there hasn’t been sufficient information to enable an intelligent consideration and response.”*
- *“Have the Council taken careful consideration when making this proposal to the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales?”*

- *“Have the authority’s plans been submitted for assessment to the Future Generations and Well-being Commissioner’s office?”*
- *“Closing Cymer Afan Comprehensive does not align with the Well-being Future Generations Act 2015 and fails to consider the long term social and economic affect that closure will have on the upper Afan Valley.”*
- *“What is the local authority’s sustainable development plan for the upper Afan Valley?”*
- *“The council are being short sighted in their proposal to close Cymer Afan Comprehensive School and have not fully considered the facts and its impact, particularly in relation to the Single Integrated Plan 2013-2023.”*
- *“The proposal is in contradiction of Section 2 of NPTCBC Local Development Plan as the closure would increase the amount of Greenhouse gases being created within the constituency of Margam and Taibach.”*
- *“The fact that Margam school is being built with surplus places means that the Council has already a clear and vested interest in closing Cymmer Comprehensive and it cannot be seen as an impartial adjudicator on these matters”*
- *“Why were the Cymer Afan Comprehensive School community not consulted at the same time as Dyffryn and Groes schools”*
- *“It is clear that the Local Authority has already decided and indeed has received grant funding to build Ysgol Newydd Margam larger than that needed as a replacement for Dyffryn and Groes on the basis that the pupils of Cymer Afan School would become pupils of this school. This decision by officers was made in excess of 12months prior to this consultation exercise. Therefore this consultation does not meet the requirements of a legally defined consultation, whereby to be proper consultation must be undertaken at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage.”*
- *“Why was the consultation document not on the Neath Port Talbot council website consultation portal page?”*
- *“Why have the children’s rights not been taken into count – Article 12 (of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) has been breached.”*
- *“The young people’s version that has been produced is of poor quality – information has been left out.”*
- *“Has a child’s rights impact assessment been completed?”*

- *“Why didn’t the Council talk to the Federation beforehand with particular focus on budgets and surplus places? The Federation has not been given any opportunity to rectify the challenges it is facing.”*
- *“As this will be a school closure and not an amalgamation all staff will be made redundant. The consultation document made no reference to any safeguarding of salary in the event that any staff member is able to be redeployed.”*
- *“There are staff who hold contracts with the federation and work in both the primary and secondary schools – what will happen with their contracts and hours of work?”*

Finance

- *“Why is no money being invested in keeping education in the upper Afan Valley?”*
- *“I want confirmation that this is not just an exercise to reduce overall education expenditure.”*
- *“Why is cost more important to quality?”*
- *“How are the costs of educating pupils reached?”*
- *“Can you clarify as to why when calculating the average cost of a student at £7111 you failed to acknowledge its foundation status and therefore excluded the pupil costs of the federation Upper Afan Federation as this would have brought the average student cost to the average £4476 and not the £7111 as incorrectly reported in paragraph 6 (of the Consultation document)?”*
- *“Pupils in the Afan Valley do not receive equity from the Council as they have less services and opportunities; they are the most deprived in the county and should receive higher funding than other schools.”*
- *“Why aren’t the budgets of the schools being federated into one? Is not combining these just an excuse to close the school?”*
- *“Has the Council been granted funding based on forecasted pupil numbers from Cymer Afan Comprehensive School?”*
- *“Have you allowed for extra staff to support the additional members of Cymer Afan Comprehensive School (pupils) in existing school budgets?”*
- *“Has the actual cost of the new build, the cost of redundancies, the ongoing cost of transport been factored into the ‘average’ amount pupils attending the new Margam school will cost should Cymer Afan Comprehensive close?”*

- *“The transport costs have not included the extra costs of providing transport for pupils who stay after school?”*
- *“Would the cost of transport be better spent improving our existing school?”*
- *“Can consideration please be given for Upper Valley Federation to be given total autonomy financial and capital to continue to manage and maintain the schools of the Afan valley?”*
- *“Has the £2.5million rural and small schools grant been accessed for Cymer Afan Comprehensive?”*
- *“Have you looked to outside investment?”*
- *“Why can’t you use the money you’ve received from the wind farms?”*
- *“Why is the extra £13m that Neath Port Talbot Council receive more than other authorities for deprivation not being spent in the Afan Valley?”*
- *“Neath Port Talbot Council receives the fourth highest level of per capita funding from the Welsh Government 13 million more than the Welsh average – mainly driven by factors such as social and economic disadvantage. This money must be used to address the problems that gave rise to this relatively high level of funding. The fact that this is not happening is borne out by findings of the Social Mobility Commission that Neath Port Talbot CBC is the worst performing local council in Wales in addressing social mobility”*

Alternative school organisation

Consultees have requested that consideration be given to a range of options for alternative school organisation in the upper Afan Valley. These consisted of options that involved new school builds, the remodelling of existing premises and combinations of both, together with proposals for a hub of community services. It was also requested that consideration be given to 3-14 education with pupils transferring to other secondary schools for their 14-16 education.

Federated Governing Body The governing body of the Upper Afan Valley Federation of Schools has responded by requesting that the consultation process be stopped. They have set out the governor and community concerns and suggested alternative proposals together with a business plan of options. In their response they state that they strongly oppose the closure of Cymer Afan Comprehensive school and that the

governors and the wider community: “...have grave concerns for the pupils and the community as a whole...” Their concerns relate to safeguarding and well-being of pupils; educational standards of pupils and impact on primary phase education; transport; impact of leisure time; social exclusion / isolation and poverty; economic impact; and community impact and environmental issues.

The federated governing body offers 3 options as alternatives to the Council’s proposal. Firstly, the continuation of the current provision in the upper Afan Valley for a period of 3-5 years to allow the engagement of external organisations such the NHS, social services and library. Secondly, a new build 3-16 school as the base for a community hub of services involving education and a range of external organisations. Thirdly, a multi-site, 3-16 provision serving education together with a community hub of external organisations in refurbished but fewer buildings.

Trade Unions

Responses have been received from the National Education Union Cymru (NEU Cymru), Unison and NASUWT. The NEU Cymru have made the following comment:

“The proposal states that the pupils will transfer to the new school at Margam. This may lead to additional staff being required but no ring fencing is being offered to the staff employed at Cymer Afan Comprehensive School. If any of the displaced staff do get a job in the new school at Margam and are currently on Leadership or hold a TLR, they are unlikely to obtain a position at a similar level as the staffing structure for the new school in respect of Leadership and TLR positions will already be in place. This could adversely affect career prospects. Whilst the authority will seek to re-deploy staff realistically there are not going to be enough vacancies for all the staff currently employed at the school. The well-being of all the staff is currently being adversely affected with many facing the prospect of no job within 18 months.”

NASUWT seeks assurances that there will be no compulsory redundancies of the 26 teaching staff at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school. They also highlight the fact that secondary staff already teach in the primary schools in the federation which makes them more cost effective and include a suggestion to make Welsh language provision available at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school in addition to the current English language provision.

Unison raise similar concerns and note that Option 3 in the consultation document is considered to be its preferred option, i.e. build a new 'all through' middle school to replace the existing secondary and four primary schools.

Community Organisations

Responses were received from Afan Valley Community Leisure and Cymmer Afan Community Library, both of which raise issues relating directly to their organisations.

The Afan Valley Community Leisure are concerned that there will be a decline in the usage of the Afan Valley Swimming Pool due to extra school and transport hours involved in travelling from the upper Afan Valley to Margam, and predict that this will lead to a drop off in major income generating activities such as swimming lessons and membership of the swimming club. The respondent is concerned that this could have a serious adverse effect on overall financial stability and will place the future of the pool at risk once again.

The Cymmer Afan Community Library comments that a close relationship has been built up with the federated schools and that children regularly visit the library during and after school hours. Concerns are expressed that the additional travelling time will prevent children having the opportunity to use the library as much as they do now.

The Trustees of the library support the option of building a new school in the area modelled on a community hub so as to provide an opportunity to develop a new cohesive approach to the delivery of services in the valley.

Estyn

It is Estyn's view that overall the proposal is likely to at least maintain the standards of education and provision in the area. In addition, Estyn comments that the proposal asserts reasonably that Cymer Afan Comprehensive School is a small school and is one of only five established mainstream secondary schools in Wales with fewer than 300 pupils.

Estyn considers that appropriate reference is made to the outcomes of the school's most recent Estyn inspection in April 2015 in which it is identified that

both the current performance and the prospects for improvement were judged to be adequate and that in November 2016 the school was judged to have made good progress in respect of the key issues for action.

The full response is included as Appendix H.

Local elected Members, AMs and MP

Responses have been received from the local members for the area together with the Assembly Members and the Member of Parliament.

Comments include:

“Cymer Afan offers a level of educational ‘added value’ which will not be readily replicated elsewhere.”

“The location of Glyncoirwg, Gwynfi, Cymmer and Croeserw, at the top of the Afan Valley, puts the communities at a disadvantage with poor transport and infrastructure links.”

“The Council’s proposal to remove secondary school provision from the Upper Afan Valley is unpalatable for many, but also leaves many questions over the future of the four primary schools, who are also part of the federation.”

“The valley has already experienced considerable population decline over many decades, this proposal would do nothing to halt or reverse this trend”

“The impact of the journey time upon the well-being of the children and their ability to fully function both at school and at home must be considered.”

“It appears that in this case the financial issues are driving the proposal rather than the standard of education received by pupils at Cymer Afan Comprehensive School.”

Officer responses to comments

Sections 8 -16 below set out the officer responses to comments received during consultation.

8. Education

A number of respondents made reference to Cymer Afan Comprehensive been ranked 6th in the Wales Online 'Real Schools Guide 2017', stating that this ranking indicates that it is the highest performing school in Neath Port Talbot and that it would, therefore, be detrimental to pupils were it to close.

The Wales Online 'Real Schools Guide 2017', which is based on 2016 data, is a media produced guide created from publicly available information on schools. It ranks schools using a system devised by journalists. It focuses on four key areas: attainment, teaching, attendance, and finance – which claim to give parents: 'a better idea of which schools will help their child prosper, no matter what their background may be'. It also claims to factor in aspects such as pupil progress, budget share per pupil and the ratio of teachers to pupils.

While the guide may provide interesting information on Welsh schools, it is not recognised by Welsh Government or local authorities as being a reliable measure for school performance. Welsh Government annually produce 'All Wales Core Data' sets which consistently report on the outcomes attained by pupils at the end of each key stage and which compare similar schools, known as the 'family' of schools, as well as all schools throughout Wales. This data is recognised to give an accurate picture of a school's performance over time and is the most widely used data set in this authority and others, and the inspectorate, Estyn.

However, it is recognised that data alone does not give a full picture of school performance. Information is also gathered from Challenge Advisors who regularly provide support and challenge for local schools through Core Visits, which can involve a range of evaluative activities including scrutiny of pupil work, lesson observations, listening to learners, training sessions for staff and governors, and formal meetings to discuss aspects of school performance. This provides the Local Authority with wide ranging information about each school and ensures that all schools throughout this County Borough and across Wales are being judged fairly and equally on matters that have the

most impact on pupil progress and attainment. The Neath Port Talbot Challenge Advisor team is part of a wider ERW service which covers Swansea, Carmarthenshire, Powys, Ceredigion and Pembroke and which ensures that standards are consistent across the region and that good practice is shared and developed.

Wales also operates the National School Categorisation System which, in partnership with local authorities and regional consortia, promotes and encourages a collaborative improvement system which enables schools to identify factors which contribute to their progress and achievement. This system is a three step model which not only relies on performance data but also examines the quality of leadership and teaching and learning within a school. From the information gathered a school is then placed within a colour coded category, which indicates the level of support that will be provided to the school during the academic year.

In 2017, 41.5% of pupils in Cymer Afan Comprehensive and 60.9% of pupils in Dyffryn attained 5 GCSE A*to C grades including English and Maths. The average for Neath Port Talbot was 51% and for all of Wales 55%. The highest performing school in Neath Port Talbot attained 63%.

In 2016, which is the year referenced in the Wales Online guide, 58.8% of Cymer Afan Comprehensive school pupils and 74.6% of Dyffryn School pupils attained 5 GCSE A*to C grades including English and Maths. Dyffryn School was the highest performing school in Neath Port Talbot in 2016, whilst Cymer Afan Comprehensive school was one of the lowest performing.

Dyffryn School has been categorised as being in the green support category for 2017 -2018, indicating that it is a highly effective school with a track record in sustaining a high level of learner outcomes. Cymer Afan Comprehensive School is placed in the yellow category of support, which indicates an effective school with good learner outcomes. 5 of the 7 secondary schools in Neath Port Talbot were categorised as green schools this year, and one of the two 'all-through' middle schools was also categorised as green.

The consultation document clearly states that this proposal is not being brought forward because Cymer Afan Comprehensive school is performing poorly or failing pupils, and the progress of the school in improving pupil

attainment in recent years is recognised. However the document also notes that pupils at Dyffryn School consistently attain good GCSE results, and there is nothing to suggest that Cymer Afan Comprehensive school pupils would not achieve at least the same standards should they transfer to Ysgol Cwm Brombil.

No secondary or 'all-through' middle school in Neath Port Talbot is deemed to be unsatisfactory or in need of significant improvement. Four secondary schools have been inspected by Estyn between 2014 and 2017 and, of those schools, two were placed into the category of Estyn monitoring (Cymer Afan Comprehensive school being one of these), while the other two were found to have a number of areas of excellence. A school which requires monitoring needs to improve areas of its performance and Estyn review progress the following year. If during the return visit inspectors consider that insufficient progress has been made, then the school may be judged to require significant improvement or special measures and be placed in one of these statutory categories. In the case of Cymer Afan Comprehensive, Estyn were satisfied that progress had been made when they returned and the school was removed from monitoring. The local authority continue to closely monitor and support schools which have been in Estyn monitoring to ensure good progress is maintained.

Cymer Afan Comprehensive school has been recognised as providing a caring and nurturing environment. This is not the only school in Neath Port Talbot that this is true of – for example in the Estyn reports for the 3 secondary schools inspected during the same period as Cymer Afan Comprehensive school, care, support and guidance were deemed to be 'excellent' in 2 of them and 'good' in the third.

Comments have also been received relating to the management of pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school and the perceived inability of other schools to support pupils effectively. All schools are required to make provision for pupils with ALN and both Cymer Afan Comprehensive and Dyffryn School have ALN pupils within their classes. The support currently received by Cymer Afan Comprehensive school pupils is likely to be of at least the same standard if they transfer to Ysgol Cwm Brombil.

In Dyffryn School almost 200 pupils (24%) have been identified as having ALN and a range of support programmes are in place to meet their needs. However the school has identified that many of these pupils lack resilience and are not consistently able to apply themselves to every lesson, every day. As a result the school has introduced a range of strategies across the school to better promote pupil well-being and resilience. Additionally the school continues to make use of the School Based Counsellor and other specialist services which have all had positive effects on pupils.

Cymer Afan Comprehensive school has over 70 pupils (34%) identified as having ALN and pupils are provided with support to make progress. The school also identifies improving pupil resilience as a focus for development, suggesting that pupils with ALN at both Cymer Afan Comprehensive school and Dyffryn School are working towards the same targets. In 2015 Estyn noted that Cymer Afan Comprehensive school's arrangements for the identification and monitoring of pupils' additional learning needs were robust and thorough and that Individual Education Plans are of a particularly high quality. This will be of particular benefit should the proposal be approved, as it will support pupil transition to Ysgol Cwm Brombil and enable new staff to quickly identify need in order to continue to support pupils effectively.

Currently Cymer Afan Comprehensive school operates a support facility entitled Place of Development (POD) which provides intervention for groups of pupils with ALN including those who have difficulties with communication, social skills, behaviour, emotional needs and sensory/physical needs. Year 6 pupils are also able to have access for one morning a week. Estyn reported that the POD supports vulnerable pupils well and is of high quality. Provision for ALN pupils at the school is noted to be outstanding.

The intervention programmes which take place in the POD are similar to those taking place in similar provisions in every secondary school in Neath Port Talbot, albeit under different titles in every school. For example, ELSA provision has been noted to be an intervention programme delivered by learning support assistants in the POD, and this is also known to be successfully delivered in Dyffryn School.

It has been claimed that the pupils of Cymer Afan Comprehensive are the most vulnerable within Neath Port Talbot based on the Vulnerability

Assessment Profile (VAP) and that this proposal increases their vulnerability. The VAP is a tool developed by the local authority for identifying pupils at risk of not making progress in school. It distinguishes a range of factors which are likely to make a pupil vulnerable to underachievement, including having additional learning needs, being eligible for free school meals, being looked after by the local authority, being excluded from a previous school, having English as an additional language and having poor attendance. Moving schools is also taken into consideration and in the case of pupils who move many times during their school years, this can be a significant factor in identifying the risk of underachievement. The purpose of the VAP, however, is not only to identify such pupils but also to ensure that the school and local authority plan and provide for the pupil's needs and provision. This proposal does not affect the VAP as the identified pupils will still exist whether they attend Cymer Afan Comprehensive, Ysgol Cwm Brombil or another school, and their needs will still be identified and supported as necessary.

Neath Port Talbot and every local authority in Wales has a statutory duty to ensure that pupils with a statement of special educational needs (SEN) have their individual learning requirements fully met while at a mainstream school. All schools strive to ensure that every statemented pupil has their needs met and are no different to Cymer Afan Comprehensive in this respect. Specifically, January 2018 PLASC⁷ data indicates that at Dyffryn School there are 11 pupils with a statement (1.4%) and at Cymer Afan Comprehensive School there are 5 pupils (2.2%). Staff at Dyffryn School are well aware of their statutory duties and are used to ensuring that pupils with ALN are supported to reach their full potential. Ysgol Cwm Brombil has appointed a SENCO and an ALNCO to oversee the full range of needs that are likely to be present in the new school, and an area of the building has already been designated as a student services hub where all pupils will be able to access additional support appropriate to need.

Should this proposal be approved, it is expected that work will take place between Cymer Afan Comprehensive school and Ysgol Cwm Brombil to ensure that each pupil's statement or individual educational plan has been reviewed and appropriate provision has been identified and planned for to meet individual needs. This will further ensure that procedures are in place to fully support pupils with additional learning needs.

⁷ PLASC – the annual school census return to Welsh Government

Neath Port Talbot is committed to a person centred approach to planning for pupils with ALN and schools are being supported to embed person centred practice. The foreword of the Welsh Government document 'Developing as a person-centred organisation' contains the words "...in every situation, the needs and aspirations of the child should always be central to all aspects of discussions and decisions". It is the case that this consultation has sought to ascertain the pupils' needs and aspirations, and the views of pupils have been recorded within this report.

Respondents have commented that Cymer Afan Comprehensive is a small school and have argued that small schools attain better results. However Estyn's report 'School Size and Educational Effectiveness' (December 2013)⁸ would suggest that small secondary schools with less than 600 pupils tend to perform less well than larger schools of 1,101 pupils or more. 20% of small and medium sized schools will require significant improvement or special measures after inspection compared to 4% of large schools, and well-being is found to be excellent in 33% of large schools compared with just 4% of small secondary schools.

There is little verified research in the UK which suggests that school size has a significant impact on educational attainment, whether they be large or small schools. However, it is the case that there is a greater amount of research information available from the USA on school size, and some of this has been referred to by consultees in their responses. There is a growing call for decreasing school size in many areas there, but school size in America is vastly different to that in Wales – in some research a small school in the USA will relate to a school of 1000 pupils while a larger school can have as many as 5000. Estyn's report on school size in Wales categorises a small secondary school as having 600 pupils or less, and a large secondary school as greater than 1,100. Relying wholly on research produced in many of the USA studies can be unreliable and not directly relevant to the situation in Wales.

⁸ Estyn - <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/default/files/documents/School%20size%20and%20educational%20effectiveness%20-%20December%202013.pdf>

It is not the case that Estyn report that small schools perform better in deprived areas. It is acknowledged by Estyn that school size is only one factor that affects school performance and larger schools (1100+ pupils) may be performing better because they often have fewer pupils eligible for free school meals. However Neath Port Talbot has the second highest number of pupils entitled to free school meals in Wales. 22.6% of Neath Port Talbot pupils were entitled to free school meals compared with the Wales average of 17.8% (PLASC 2017), and as such it could be argued that all schools in this County Borough are affected by deprivation to some degree.

Class sizes in larger schools have been raised as a concern. A larger school does not necessarily mean that pupils will be taught in larger classes. Some of the larger schools in Neath Port Talbot have similar class sizes to Cymer Afan Comprehensive. Small class sizes have the biggest impact on progress of very young pupils, and the effect of a low adult to pupil ratio has very little impact by the time a pupil progresses to key stage 3, other than for those pupils with ALN. In secondary schools, greater pupil numbers can be a benefit as it can lead to broader and more balanced curriculum provision, and more opportunity for pupils to share the learning experiences with a larger peer group.

Concerns have been expressed over potential bullying in larger schools and the impact this will have on upper Afan Valley pupils who are presented as being 'different' to those living in more urban areas. There are fears that they will be more likely to become victims of bullying in a school outside of the upper Afan Valley. A number of respondents reason that because they encountered bullying while they were in school, then it follows that it will also happen to Cymer Afan Comprehensive school pupils transferring to schools outside the upper Afan Valley. Much has been achieved in recent years to raise awareness of bullying, recognising the negative effects of bullying on children and young people. Bullying is not tolerated in schools and school staff work hard to ensure that incidents of bullying are dealt with when it occurs, and that victims are properly supported. Greater respect and tolerance of diversity are promoted and pupils who are experiencing bullying are encouraged to speak out in an effort to prevent further incidents. Research⁹ indicates that physical bullying is the top bullying concern for children aged 11 and under; peer pressure is top for 12–15 year olds and

⁹ What Children are telling us about Bullying , ChildLine Bullying Report 2015/2016

online bullying for 16–18 year olds. These issues are the same regardless of the size of school that children attend. Larger schools may have more reported instances of bullying as there more pupils attending there, but research¹⁰ also indicates that there is as much as a 10% increase in pupils' awareness of bullying and of what steps can be taken to prevent bullying in larger schools (975 pupils or above) than smaller schools (258 pupils or below). There is also no firm evidence to suggest that bullies identify victims because of where they live, and it seems very unlikely that upper Afan Valley pupils will be victimised or bullied because of this, particularly in a school such as Ysgol Cwm Brombil which will have pupils from many different areas of Port Talbot. Once pupils start at Ysgol Cwm Brombil they will become pupils of that school and will be treated as such by staff and by peers. It is reported that at Dyffryn School there are few incidents of bullying or harassment and where these occur they are dealt with immediately in line with school policies. Additionally pupil voice surveys report that 99% of pupils feel safe in school and value the secure environment that the school offers. Estyn also confirm that 99% of pupils in Dyffryn School reported that they feel safe in school when surveyed during inspection in 2016.

Consultation has noted concerns that pupils moving from Cymer Afan Comprehensive school to Ysgol Cwm Brombil will suffer disruption to their education or will be disadvantaged where their work is concerned. While it is indeed the case that a move between schools can be disruptive, very many pupils move between schools regularly in Neath Port Talbot with little or no ill effect, especially when the move takes place at the start of a term or school year. Should the proposal be approved, pupils from the upper Afan Valley will start as a group at Ysgol Cwm Brombil in September 2019, not as lone individuals as would normally be the case. Many months of preparation for the move will have taken place beforehand, including planned transition events for pupils, regular staff meetings to discuss pupils, agreement over curriculum arrangements, ALN support, etc. There is sufficient time available to ensure that it can be well planned and that transition is a smooth process with pupils being fully supported throughout. Dyffryn School provides education for a wide range of abilities and the staff are used to teaching pupils with different needs and abilities.

¹⁰ A Survey into the Prevalence and Incidence of School Bullying in Wales, Welsh Assembly Government 2016

Particular concerns have been raised over pupils in Year 10 and 11 who will be sitting GCSE examinations at the time of the proposed move. Thorough planning, good communication between the two schools and support from local authority officers should alleviate these concerns and minimise disruption for pupils. Recent evaluations of Ysgol Bae Baglan's first year of opening have shown that pupils transferring there in Y11 made at least the expected level of progress regardless of the transition. Due to the changes at key stage 4, in 2017 the number of pupils attaining 5 GCSE A* to C grades including English and Maths across Neath Port Talbot schools fell to 51.4%, a 9.5pp drop from 2016. Across Wales the decrease was 5.7pp (60.3% to 54.6%). However at Ysgol Bae Baglan the percentage was 37.3%, a decrease of 6.7pp from the combined percentage of Cwrt Sart, Sandfields and Glan Afan in 2016 which is slightly greater than the national average but nearly 3pp below the decrease across all Neath Port Talbot schools. These pupils were subject to a move in Y11, coming from three different secondary schools into Ysgol Bae Baglan but the data would suggest that the move did not have a detrimental impact on the performance of these pupils.

There are concerns that current staff at the school will leave due to the threat of closure and that pupils will have a poorer education as a result. It is important that a decision on the proposal is made promptly to prevent the issue of drift and to avoid causing stress and anxiety through uncertainty. The risk of significant numbers of staff leaving the school in the final year is small and in previous school closures this has not been an issue. However, the Council respects the rights of staff to further their careers and this would be the case whether or not the council was proposing a school closure.

There is every reason to believe that Cymer Afan Comprehensive School pupils will benefit from the 21st learning environment which is being created in Margam, and will have better access to a wider range of facilities and opportunities than they do currently. Thorough transition and good communication between the schools, should the proposal be approved, will ensure that current friendship groups continue and opportunities will be given to ensure that new relationships are formed before moving to Ysgol Cwm Brombil, helping to alleviate some of the anxieties felt when faced with new and unfamiliar situations. Experience with other school reorganisations has shown this to be the case.

Consultees have commented on the fact that Neath Port Talbot is ranked as having the lowest level of social mobility in Wales compared to the other 21 local authorities. The Social Mobility Index (SMI) explores how geographical location can affect social mobility for individuals growing up and choosing to live in different areas. Officers believe that this proposal should have a positive influence on indicators of social mobility and improve opportunities for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, raising aspirations and reducing variations in pupil attainment.

As stated in the consultation document should a decision be taken to close the school, all staff with contracts attached to Cymer Afan Comprehensive School will be declared redundant. Employees identified at risk of redundancy will be supported by the Council's policies and HR staff.

As part of the process all school based staff will be supported by the relevant school policies and procedures which will include full consultation. Previous experience has shown that as a result of school reorganisation some staff take the opportunity to undertake new challenges elsewhere. Employees identified at risk of redundancy will be given access to the Council's prior consideration register. The Council is committed to supporting staff at risk of compulsory redundancy and has secured the support and goodwill of the teacher associations/trade unions and governing bodies across the Council, via an employers' pledge. The Council has a proven track record for supporting staff in such situations.

9. Federation

Respondents to the consultation fear that this proposal is paving the way for closures of the primary schools of the upper Afan Valley federation and that the federation cannot continue without the secondary school. Currently, the Council has no plans to close any of the federated primary schools. The four remaining schools are able continue to operate as a federation and continue to benefit from a federated arrangement. This can be achieved with some amendment to the leadership and governance structure currently in place.

The federation of schools in the upper Afan Valley was formed to manage the impact of falling school rolls and the financial pressures that this has placed on each school, particularly in respect of ensuring that the curriculum needs of the pupils could be met. By federating and operating under the management of one governing body, the budgets allocated to individual schools could be 'pooled' and resources directed to where needed most. It also provided the legislative framework to enable staffing structures to be changed in order to deliver education in a way that is more cost effective and efficient, the most recognisable change being the appointment of one head teacher across the five schools. The effect of this meant more resources for teaching and learning as all five schools are funded as though there was a head teacher employed at each school. The salary savings resulting from the single leadership structure allows the federated governing body to use its resources to best effect across the federation. This financial benefit will continue to be available to a federated governing body serving primary schools alone. Similarly, a single leadership structure serving the four primary schools is able to continue should the secondary school close. There is much to be gained by the four primary schools from a federated arrangement. In Wales schools are managed by governing bodies under a local management of schools scheme which gives governors the power to take decisions about how schools are run.

Transition between key stages two and three is acknowledged to be a successful aspect of the upper Afan Valley federation and concerns have been expressed that this successful transition cannot be maintained if the pupils transfer to Ysgol Cwm Brombil. While it may require thorough planning due to greater distances between the primary schools and Ysgol Cwm Brombil, it does not mean that transition cannot take place equally as well as current arrangements. Many schools across the County Borough have very good transition arrangements, even where there are distances between the secondary and partner primary schools that make the arrangements more challenging.

Success in partnership working and the transition arrangements which feature depend largely on the quality of school leadership and a willingness on the part of head teachers, teachers and governing bodies to make it a success. In this respect, Ysgol Cwm Brombil is starting from a sound position. Dyffryn School works well with its partner primaries and Estyn reported in 2014 that

partnership working was 'excellent'. As a 3-16 school, Ysgol Cwm Brombil will be ensuring that the Y6 pupils who attend its partner primary schools, which would include the upper Afan Valley primary schools should this proposal be implemented, are able to benefit from the same support that the Y6 pupils in the Dyffryn School cluster currently enjoy.

If parents choose to send their children to schools other than Ysgol Cwm Brombil then transition work would be more of a challenge as the primary schools would need to work with a greater number of secondary schools. This would undoubtedly make transition work much more difficult for the primaries.

If the secondary school were to close then secondary school staff who work across the federation may no longer be available and the delivery of some more specialist curriculum areas in the primary schools could be lost. However, Dyffryn School partner primary schools currently have a similar arrangement in place and it is anticipated that this will be developed further at Ysgol Cwm Brombil. Being part of Ysgol Cwm Brombil's cluster of partner primary schools, the upper Afan Valley pupils will benefit from secondary teaching expertise in the same way as the other partner schools would. Such arrangements would also enable secondary phase staff in Ysgol Cwm Brombil to build relationships with staff, pupils and families from an early stage, similar to work undertaken by Cymer Afan Comprehensive school.

It should be noted that not all Year 6 pupils who will move into Year 7 in Ysgol Cwm Brombil will already be in the school. Ysgol Cwm Brombil will admit children in Year 7 from Cwmafan Primary, Central Primary, Eastern Primary and Coed Hirwaun Primary, and transition work will be ongoing for pupils in these schools as well as the schools in the upper Afan Valley, to ensure that pupils move smoothly and easily from Year 6 to Year 7 every year.

10. Transport and travel

For pupils living in Neath Port Talbot, the Council is responsible for assessing the suitability of travel between home and school to enable pupils to attend school regularly. Free transport is provided for secondary age pupils living 3 miles or more from their nearest suitable school. In the case of the Council's proposal to provide education at Ysgol Cwm Brombil for pupils living in the

upper Afan Valley, although not the nearest suitable school, free transport will be made available. Detailed information on travel assistance can be found in the Council's Home to School Travel Policy¹¹.

– ***Pupil safety and well-being***

Pupil safety and well-being on school transport are given high priority by the Council which is required to put in place suitable transport arrangements to ensure that, as far as reasonably practicable, travel between home and school does not cause unreasonable levels of stress¹². For upper Afan Valley pupils attending Ysgol Cwm Brombil, the Council considers that the most suitable transport provision that meets the specific needs of the pupils involved is to provide dedicated home to school transport on buses. The route and the distance (more than 3 miles) make walking or cycling unreasonable. It is recognised that for some pupils the ability to walk or cycle from home to school will be lost under this proposal, a concern for those keen to promote fitness and reduce obesity. However there will still be opportunities through curricular and extra-curricular arrangements for pupils to learn about the importance of a healthy lifestyle and to take part in activities that promote fitness and good health. This is in line with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, specifically the need to achieve a society in which pupils' physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood. It is to be noted that, under the current home to school travel arrangements, pupils from Glyncorwg, Cynonville/Duffryn Rhondda and Blaengwynfi/Abergwynfi travel to and from school by bus. It is also possible to arrange bus pick-up points that facilitate walking and cycling to the bus stop which would address concerns about reducing pupils' ability to lead healthy, active and safer lifestyles.

Before a home to school travel route is put in place, the contracted bus operator will carry out risk assessments on the suitability of vehicles and the routes. Risk assessments are updated annually to ensure that they remain relevant, taking into account any changes in circumstances and/or legislation.

¹¹ Home to School Travel Policy

https://www.npt.gov.uk/media/4231/npt_home_to_school_travel_policy_2017.pdf

¹² Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance -

<https://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/140616-ltog-en-v2.pdf>

There are no specified travel time or travel distance limits that determine the length of journey between home and school. In raising concerns over the time spent on a school bus and the behaviour, well-being and safety of pupils, one respondent points to the DofE: New home to school travel and transport guidance¹³. This guidance applies to England. Wales has separate guidance, the Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance¹⁴. The guidance for England states that best practice suggests that the maximum each way length of journey for a secondary school age pupil is 75 minutes. Another respondent quoted a study in Northern Ireland. A recently commissioned independent review of home to school transport¹⁵ for Northern Ireland recommended a maximum journey time, including walking and waiting time, of no more than 2.5 hours per day for post-primary school pupils. The guidance in Wales does not specify journey times and relies on an assessment of reasonable journey time.

An assessment of reasonable journey time or distance is one that takes into account the learner's age, ability and the locality of the pupil's home in relation to the available schools in the vicinity. A trial bus run between the upper Afan Valley and Margam has initially assessed the route as suitable.

The distance between Gwynfi, the furthest community in the upper Afan Valley from Margam, and Ysgol Cwm Brombil is approx. 13 miles with a journey time, including stops, of approx. 45 minutes. Some secondary age pupils living in the Gwynfi area and attending Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Llangynwyd currently have 'travel to school' distances equivalent to the journey from the upper Afan Valley to Ysgol Cwm Brombil. Their daily travel, which takes them via Glyncorrwg and Cymmer, means a one way journey between home and school of approx. 12 miles. Primary age children attending Ysgol Cynwyd Sant have a similar daily journey of approx. 10 miles. It has been commented that this is a consequence of parental choice and that the children could attend local schools in the upper Afan Valley. The reality is that there is no nearer alternative school for children being educated through

¹³ DofE guidance - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/295189/Home_to_School_Transport_Consultation_Document.pdf

¹⁴ Learner Travel Guidance 2014 - <http://gov.wales/docs/det/publications/140616-ltogg-en.pdf>

¹⁵ Independent review of home to school transport 2015 - <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/executive-summary-independent-home-to-school-transport-review-english-version.pdf>

the medium of Welsh. Therefore, for these pupils and their parents there is no choice.

A number of consultees have highlighted research documents which claim that the impact of journey lengths and travel time, in particular lengthy commutes, have a negative effect on well-being, including research undertaken by Prof. Jennifer Roberts in 2014¹⁶ and the Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2014¹⁷. The ONS report focuses on comparing adults travelling to work or working from home and compares aspects of well-being such as life satisfaction, sense of worth, happiness and anxiety levels. Prof. Roberts' report looks at differences between men and women and how a daily commute impacts on income, job and housing quality. Both reports conclude that lengthy commutes have a negative effect on well-being. However there is little evidence available to demonstrate effects of travel on the well-being of school children, and some of the findings reported in both pieces of research would suggest that aspects that impact most significantly on adults would not be the case for children and young people. Areas of high anxiety for adults particularly when using public transport include delays in the journey time, isolation, lack of control and lack of flexibility. For pupils travelling on school transport these factors are less likely to be of concern.

More recent research by the University of the West of England¹⁸ in 2017 highlights that a range of factors impact on well-being and report that: "longer commute times were not found to have a large impact on life satisfaction overall", although again this report refers to working adults. It does note, however, that younger people (under 30 years of age) are less sensitive to longer commute durations.

Discussions with pupils in various schools show that, for some, travelling to school by bus can lead to anxiety and stress, while for others the same journey can be an enjoyable and productive experience, where the opportunity to socialise with peers at the start and end of a school day is welcomed. An understanding that pupils are individuals who will react differently to the same situation will ensure that transition activities can be used to directly target support for those pupils who may initially be anxious

¹⁶ "It's driving her mad": Gender differences in the effects of commuting on psychological health

¹⁷ Commuting and Personal Well-being, 2014

¹⁸ The Commuting and Well-being Study: Understanding the Impact of Commuting on People's Lives

and unhappy about travelling arrangements in an effort to alleviate their concerns.

Ysgol Cwm Brombil's start and finish times have recently been agreed by Governors and it is now known that school will start at 8.30am and finish at 3.00pm. During the winter months with shortened days and average daylight of 8 hours some pupils may be leaving for school before sunrise and/or returning home after sunset. The school day will be the same length of time as other schools in the local authority, so although this will mean an earlier start for most pupils than they currently experience, it will also mean that they will finish earlier, allowing time for extra-curricular activities both at school and in their home communities.

Parents and pupils have expressed concern about potential bad behaviour on school buses travelling to Ysgol Cwm Brombil. Around 130 pupils attending Cymer Afan Comprehensive School currently travel by bus from their homes in Gwynfi, Glyncorwg and Abercregan and for these pupils it is likely that their buses will contain the same pupils when travelling to Ysgol Cwm Brombil. Pupils living in Croeserw who currently have a walk to school, a journey of approx. 20 minutes, will have a bus journey direct to Ysgol Cwm Brombil from Croeserw.

There is no evidence to support the view that bullying is more likely to take place during the journey to school than anywhere else or that it is a problem on school transport. Recent research in England and Scotland (December 2015)¹⁹ highlights that the majority of bullying incidents take place in the school environment and not during the journey to and from school. However, should bullying occur on a school bus then the school and the transport company involved would deal with any issues, as is the case currently in schools across Neath Port Talbot. The Council has a School Bus Travel Code²⁰ giving guidance to pupils on safe travel and responsible behaviour. The Travel Code gives advice on reporting poor behaviour or bullying. Pupils not following the rules of the Code could lose their right to home to school transport.

¹⁹ Bullying of young people: Recent Research in England and Scotland

²⁰ Travel Code - <https://www.npt.gov.uk/media/4228/travelbehaviourcodeenglishversion.pdf>

Escorts or passenger assistants are generally not provided on transport to secondary schools unless a pupil with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) who is capable of travelling on mainstream school transport specifically requires an assistant. The passenger assistant's main role would be to care for the ALN pupil. As regards the detailed transport arrangements for a pupil with ALN, this will depend on their individual circumstances. There is a duty on local authorities to assess and make suitable travel arrangements for children with ALN to facilitate the pupil's attendance at school including ALN pupils who, because of their specific learning needs, have difficulty travelling on buses.

The safety of pupils on the journey to and from school is a matter which the Council is active in pursuing. Since October 2014, every bus used for dedicated home to school transport must have a seat belt fitted to every passenger seat. Where a bus is fitted with seat belts, a bus operator is required to take reasonable steps to ensure that all pupils, as passengers, are informed that it is a legal requirement to wear a fitted seat belt. Wearing of seatbelts is mandatory under the School Bus Travel Code and pupils are expected to adhere to this rule.

Bus operators are required to ensure that drivers are aware of their responsibilities in the event of a vehicle breakdown, accident or dangerous road conditions and that in such circumstances they should contact their control point immediately. The Council requires bus operators to make sure that their drivers are provided with mobile telephones or are in radio contact with their home depot in case of an emergency and have available on the vehicle the telephone numbers of the people who should be notified in an emergency, such as the bus operator, the Council's Transport Unit and the schools served. In the event of a breakdown, a bus operator is contractually obliged to ensure the onward transportation of its passengers, and the responsibility for putting in place the necessary arrangements lies with the bus operator with the assistance of the Council. Where there is a need to modify or vary a route because of unforeseen circumstances, such as a road blockage resulting from a landslip, the Council has agreements in place with contractors to vary the routes and or timings.

It is recognised that weather conditions in the upper Afan Valley can differ significantly from those occurring nearer the coastline and that during the winter months snow and ice can be more of an issue. There is nothing to

suggest significant disruption of the bus services because of main highway conditions and an analysis of school closure information due to inclement weather reveals that over the previous four winters, Cymer Afan Comprehensive School has been closed for snow on only three occasions and these were in January 2013. There have been some late starts because of weather conditions and this winter has seen further closures, although on 19th March (2018), when snowfall resulted in all schools in the upper Afan Valley closing, the main roads were open to vehicles and all local bus services operated as normal including all home to school routes from the upper Afan Valley to Maesteg, Neath and Port Talbot. The only services in the area that did not operate were those cancelled because of school closures in the upper Afan Valley.

During inclement weather, such as snowfall, it is the bus operator's decision, in conjunction with the Council and the school, as to whether or not school buses should run. Should there be concerns over pupil safety because of inclement weather or road conditions then decisions regarding transportation will be taken at the time the concerns arise and will involve good communication between transport managers, operators and the school. If a vehicle is not able to go any further on a route, the operator must contact the Council's Transport Unit and, depending on weather conditions, road conditions and weather forecast, a decision will be taken about how best to proceed and what action to take. These can range from waiting for the weather to pass over, the re-prioritising of the supply of 4x4 vehicles and gritting vehicles to clear roads, to requesting assistance from the emergency services. Until alternative arrangements are in place, pupils should remain with the vehicle. To the Council's knowledge no children attending schools in Neath Port Talbot have been left stranded at school due to adverse weather conditions and good communication between all parties is vital to ensure this doesn't happen in the future. While removing groups of children from school early could be disruptive and mean that teaching time is lost, it is doubtful that this would impact significantly on pupil progress unless it were to happen on a regular basis, which is highly unlikely.

For a bus operator to hold an Operating Licence, vehicles must be correctly maintained and appropriate records are kept of all maintenance work carried out. These conditions are monitored by the DVSA and Traffic Commissioner. In addition the Council has in its conditions of contract with bus operators to

ensure that vehicle checks are conducted daily on every vehicle providing contracted services for home to school transport. Such vehicles are examined at appropriate regular intervals to ensure they are safe and road-worthy and inspections can take place without prior notice. The Council can inspect all documents and certificates relating to vehicles whenever required and can terminate contracts with bus operators as necessary.

All passenger carrying vehicle (PCV) drivers must have the relevant vocational driving licence at category D and must have a 'Driver Certificate of Professional Competence' (DCPC). To obtain a DCPC a driver must complete a minimum of 35 hours periodic driver training within a 5 year period. The DCPC will need to be renewed every 5 years. A valid Driver Qualification Card as proof of training and a valid current driver's licence must be carried at all times. Any person employed by the bus operator as a driver must be suitably, physically and mentally capable of carrying out their respective duties and shall be approved by the Council prior to their commencing any duties. Bus operators shall ensure that its drivers or any person involved will attend any courses and undertake any training organised and paid for by the Council.

Drivers must be familiar with the route, pick up locations and the school site, and bus operators shall ensure that, where possible, the same drivers are used on the same routes.

Before anyone is employed by a bus operator on a home to school transport service an enhanced criminal background check is undertaken and the Council notified of the outcome. This check is renewed every three years.

– ***Practical issues for pupils and parents***

There are practical issues in ensuring the pupils who rely on home to school transport are able to access the extra-curricular activities that a school offers and which are seen as important to pupil engagement and development, such as team sports.

Many schools, including all secondary schools in Neath Port Talbot, admit pupils from outside of the immediate vicinity of the school and very many children and young people are transported to school every day from all parts of the County Borough. These challenges are faced by many schools and are

appropriately and sensitively managed to suit the particular needs of the schools and the communities they serve.

Arrangements for extra-curricular activities are not an uncommon challenge for schools that have pupils attending from outside the immediate area of the school but, with effective management, schools ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to participate. Ysgol Cwm Brombil will also seek to put in place the necessary arrangements to ensure equality of provision and experiences for all pupils, but those are management decisions that will be taken when the outcome of this proposal is known. The temporary governing body of Ysgol Cwm Brombil has stated, they will welcome pupils and parents of the upper Afan Valley as full members of the school community. In this respect they will be keen to ensure their responsibilities towards all pupils are met equally.

There are a range of solutions to this problem found by other schools that include: arrangements with public transport companies, using school minibuses, arranging activities at lunchtime or other times during the school day or facilitating car shares with parents. Extra transport for extra-curricular activities, or for other reasons, is not provided by the local authority, although some schools do make provision for this.

The same active management arrangements will apply where pupils become unwell or need to leave school during the day. Contingency arrangements are made and schools manage the situation in the best and most appropriate way possible, always with the pupil's well-being foremost in mind.

It is noted that public transport between the upper Afan Valley and Margam is not direct and that this could cause difficulties for families without access to a vehicle. Families would not be penalised for a pupil's late arrival at school where the delay has been caused by heavy traffic, road works or other unforeseen circumstances which causes authorised home to school transport to be late. Similarly, if a pupil is required to attend a medical appointment there will be no penalty. However, getting a child to school after a medical appointment will be the responsibility of the parent in the same way as it falls to the parent to make arrangements for transport to a hospital for an appointment. With regard to the use of detention, schools with pupils relying on school transport will manage behavioural issues in ways that do not place a pupil at risk of not returning home safely.

It is the responsibility of parents/carers to ensure that their child catches the school bus on time every day, as is the case for all other pupils in Neath Port Talbot using school or public transport, or to make other arrangements for their child to make his/her way to school. Elsewhere, where pupils are transported to school there has been no noted detrimental effect on punctuality or on attendance and there is no local evidence to suggest that pupils who travel to school by bus are more likely to have issues with attendance. Concern has been expressed that the Education Welfare Service will be diminished by this proposal. The Education Welfare Service is a central provision with officers based at secondary schools. It will be for the Council to ensure that, operating from Ysgol Cwm Brombil, the support for attendance provided by the Education Welfare Service in the upper Afan Valley is as effective as the current arrangements.

Schools will strive to ensure that all parents are able to attend school organised events and will make provision to communicate effectively with parents and carers. In some situations this could mean holding meetings in the community - in the partner primary schools for example, to ensure that parents are able to attend. Once again this will be best managed by the schools involved to suit the needs of the particular pupils who attend. Parents will not be able to claim transport expenses from the local authority or from the school.

– ***Travel to Ysgol Cwm Brombil***

Until a decision is taken on the Council's proposal and parents indicate their preferences for an alternative school, details of bus routes and bus stops remain to be determined. At this stage it is not possible to be specific about how many buses will be required for any given route and where buses will need to stop. This may not be known until the year of transfer as parents can choose not to send their children to Ysgol Cwm Brombil if they wish. Any works needed to bus stops, such as adding shelters, will not be identified until it is known which stops will be used. At this stage no additional infrastructure work on bus stops is planned.

The trial run took place on Thursday, 1st February 2018 using a 54 seater coach. At 8.38 a.m. the coach departed from the bus turning area at Heol Y Nant, Blaengwynfi, and travelled to the Ysgol Cwm Brombil site in Margam,

arriving at 9.14 a.m., a journey of 36 minutes. Adding on 9 x 'one minute' stops between Jersey Road, Blaengwynfi, and Pentwyn Road, Cynonville, to simulate pupil pick-ups, the total journey time between Blaengwynfi and Ysgol Cwm Brombil is estimated to be approx. 45 minutes.

A return test drive departed Ysgol Cwm Brombil on the same day at 3.19 p.m. and arrived at the bus turning area, Heol Y Nant, Blaengwynfi at 3.55 p.m., which replicated the morning's drive time of 36 minutes. Applying the same 9 x 'one minute' stops results in a total return journey time of approx. 45 minutes.

Because of pupil numbers, it is possible that the school bus from Gwynfi will be full before it arrives at Cymer and, therefore, not all stops included in the test drive will necessarily be made on a day to day basis, which could result in marginally shorter travel time to Ysgol Cwm Brombil.

Site configuration at Ysgol Cwm Brombil provides off road parking for school buses. Pupils boarding the buses will do so at the bus bays within the confines of the school site where there are sufficient bus bays for the number of buses required for the anticipated pupil roll of the school.

A full traffic impact assessment has been undertaken in order to inform the planning considerations and approvals for the new school build. Planning consent has been granted.

Concerns have been expressed at the perceived poor air quality in Port Talbot and Margam. These relate to a view held that attending a school near the M4 motorway and in the close vicinity of the steelworks will be detrimental to the health and well-being of pupils from the upper Afan Valley. This view will have been reinforced by recent media reports describing Port Talbot as "Britain's most polluted town". Such media claims follow the publication of a World Health Organisation (WHO)²¹ report that quoted figures to support this 'most polluted' view of the town - figures that the WHO now accepts are wrong. In contrast, the correct figure puts Port Talbot, despite being bisected by the M4 and hosting one of Europe's biggest steel mills on a par with, or cleaner than, many other towns and cities. The WHO has taken immediate steps to rectify the mistake on its website and database.

²¹ World Health Organisation - <http://www.who.int/>

The WHO praises all cities that collect and disseminate information on outdoor air quality for their actions. Neath Port Talbot Council is active in monitoring its air quality and has a longstanding strategy and programme to manage this process. It regularly monitors and reports its local air quality measurements.

The most recent Air Quality Progress Report (July 2017)²² demonstrates good progress and no cause for concern in the Margam area. This will help to alleviate concerns that pupils will be at risk of suffering ill effects from air pollution if they attend Ysgol Cwm Brombil.

Extra traffic on the road will increase levels of emissions. However, it is the case now in the upper Afan Valley that approx. 130 pupils are transported daily to Cymer Afan Comprehensive School. Travelling by vehicle to school for many pupils; particularly for those living in rural areas is a necessity, not an option. However, pupils travelling to school on relatively few school buses will have less environmental impact than pupils travelling in numerous cars. The Council's home to school transport policy will make available to secondary age pupils in the upper Afan valley school transport to Ysgol Cwm Brombil, free of charge. Whilst Ysgol Cwm Brombil is the Council's designated receiving school, Maesteg Comprehensive is the nearest suitable school and free transport will also be available there if admission is approved and transport requested. This removes the need for parents to transport their children to school. It is recommended that pupils who are entitled to free home to school travel use the buses provided.

The Council recognises air quality issues locally and has a longstanding strategy and programme to address it. The Council is involved in a research programme with three universities led by Cardiff and Swansea universities in environmental monitoring work as well as working closely with the manufacturing sector and other partners to make improvements. The Welsh Government is also playing its part with the recent proposal to extend the 50 mph limit on the M4.

²² Air Quality Progress Report - <https://www.npt.gov.uk/media/7900/npt-progress-report-2017.pdf>

11. 21st Century build projects

This proposal seeks to enable upper Afan Valley pupils to benefit from a 21st century school build and to ensure that they have the same opportunities as other Neath Port Talbot children and young people in new build schemes.

Ysgol Cwm Brombil will open in the autumn term 2018 and will provide pupils from the areas currently served by Dyffryn School and Groes Primary with a new build, state of the art school. This does not mean that pupils attending will be taught a different curriculum to any other school in Neath Port Talbot or in Wales, but it does mean that they will benefit from having a 21st century learning environment, built specifically to meet the needs and aspirations of education at this time and for the foreseeable future. There is a growing body of research available which highlights how an improved learning environment can benefit outcomes. Estyn reported in 2007 (*An evaluation of performance of schools before and after moving into new buildings or significantly refurbished premises*) on its findings which, while recognising other research from other countries within and outside the UK had some differences in conclusions, were able to identify 16 secondary schools in Wales for which direct attainment comparisons could be made. A comparison of the core subject indicator (CSI) at the end of key stage 4 over three years (2003 -2005) revealed that the percentages of pupils attaining the CSI went up by an average of 3.9pp in new build schools.

Other research also demonstrates that the impact of the learning environment on pupil progress can be significant with some studies claiming that a child / young person's progress can increase by up to 25% in an academic year when in a favourable environment. New build schools benefit from increased natural light, better acoustics, effective sound proofing and more efficient temperature control, all elements which are proven to have an impact on a pupil's ability to learn. New builds also provide greater natural outdoor spaces, which are widely recognised to be of benefit to health and emotional well-being, and to ensure that there are large spaces both indoors and outdoors available for pupils for recreation, leading to improvements in well-being and social interaction. All of these factors will greatly enhance the teaching and learning experience for staff and pupils.

It has been suggested that evidence has been provided by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) that disagrees with this research. This has been derived from the Sutton Trust-EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit which is 'an accessible summary of educational research', originally commissioned by the Sutton Trust and produced as the 'Pupil Premium Toolkit' by Durham University in May 2011. It is viewed as a resource which helps head teachers prioritise pupil premium spending (additional funding for publicly funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils of all abilities) and currently covers over 30 topics, each summarised in terms of their average impact on attainment, the strength of the evidence supporting them and their cost. The EEF has not carried out research into new school builds but using research that is available does suggest that providing pupils with a new building can be very expensive and on its own does not improve attainment. This agrees with the statements above – a building alone cannot make a difference to outcomes, but new buildings can greatly improve and enhance the educational experience for staff and pupils which, in turn, improves conditions for teaching and learning, and which can ultimately impact on pupil attainment.

Ysgol Cwm Brombil will replace Dyffryn School and Groes Primary school and is being constructed on the existing site shared by the two schools. Dyffryn School is a secondary school on two separate sites and was identified as being in need of significant repair work and a strong business case was developed to obtain funding for a new build school to incorporate pupils from 3 to 16 years of age. Including Groes Primary in the scheme not only provides pupils with the benefits of an 'all-through' education, but also meant that all of the site would be available for development and that primary pupils would also be able to enjoy and benefit from new build, 21st century facilities. The existing shared site is in the Council's ownership and available to the Council for a new build. It is suitable in size to meet the accommodation and external area requirements of a combined primary and secondary school. Cwmafan has been suggested as a more central location for a secondary school serving the Afan Valley and Port Talbot / Margam areas. There is no obvious land mass available in the Cwmafan area suitable in size or location for a 1200 place secondary school.

It has been stated that it is the vision of Neath Port Talbot Council to create 3 - 16 schools, and while it is indeed the case that in some areas 3 -16 schools

have been developed, whether as single site new builds or under a federated arrangement, the Council does not consider that this is the only approach for delivering education. For pupils in the upper Afan Valley a 3-16 educational experience has been of benefit. However, as set out in the consultation document, a review of education in the area would suggest greater benefits can be realised by secondary aged pupils through receiving their education at Ysgol Cwm Brombil.

It has been stated that parents from the upper Afan Valley will not support the Council's consultation proposal to transfer pupils to Ysgol Cwm Brombil even if it is implemented. Instead they will send their children to alternative schools or make arrangements for children to be home educated. Should the Council decide to implement its plan, then it is hoped that the benefits to the pupils in attending Ysgol Cwm Brombil will be acknowledged by parents. A concern has been expressed about oversubscription at the new school with pupils from the upper Afan Valley being denied places there. Where demand for places at Ysgol Cwm Brombil exceeds its capacity, then the Council, in line with its admission policy, will ensure that priority for places is given to the catchment area pupils. Under this proposal, pupils from the upper Afan Valley will become catchment pupils of Ysgol Cwm Brombil and will have the same entitlement and priority to a place as other pupils living within the realigned catchment area.

Ysgol Cwm Brombil is due to open to pupils in 2018, while this proposal has an implementation date of September 2019. It has been suggested during consultation that it would be fairer for all pupils to start in the new school at the same time. It is too late for this to happen unless parents make that choice ahead of the outcome of this consultation. There are some advantages for Cymer Afan Comprehensive school pupils in not joining until the year after the school opens. This will give parents and prospective pupils an opportunity to see the school in operation and for transition events to take place in a finished building with management systems and curriculum arrangements already in place. As the secondary aged pupils of Ysgol Cwm Brombil currently exist in Dyffryn School, and consequently are, in the main, occupying the site of the new school, it is expected that they will be familiar with its structure and operation, and therefore the transition for them should be more straightforward. For pupils in Cymer Afan Comprehensive school who may not share the same awareness and understanding of the site and the build,

transition will need to be more thorough and carefully managed, so an extra year for this to take place could be of value.

It is the case that the Governing Body of Ysgol Cwm Brombil will have been established in the autumn term 2018, and it may be more difficult for parents from Cymer Afan to join the governing body after 2019. Nevertheless, discussions can take place with the temporary Governing Body to find a solution to this challenge if it is deemed to be a significant factor in the success of pupils moving to the school. If the proposal is implemented then, in advance of the pupils transferring, arrangements may be made for a representative of the upper Afan Valley to be included on the governing body at the time it is constituted. The current temporary Governing Body at Ysgol Cwm Brombil already comprises of members of the governing bodies of Dyffryn and Groes who have come together to work as one for the good of the new school regardless of which previous school they represented, and it is to be expected that any new governor and any additional representative to the governing body would work with the same purpose and intention.

A suggestion to make Welsh language provision available at Cymer Afan in addition to the current English language provision has been put forward. The number of pupils from the upper Afan Valley attending Welsh-medium schools is very small and will have no significant impact on the small numbers attending Cymer Afan Comprehensive School. An increase in pupil numbers seeking Welsh-medium education will result in fewer available for English-medium education as it will be the same group of pupils from which both mediums of instruction will need to draw.

Ysgol Cwm Brombil is intended to accommodate 210 primary age pupils (plus nursery) and 1200 secondary age pupils. There will be sufficient space within the new school to accommodate secondary age pupils from the existing catchment area of Dyffryn School together with additional pupils from elsewhere, up to the intended capacity limit of 1200. There is insufficient capacity on site to accommodate the intended primary and secondary pupil rolls of 210 (plus nursery) and 1200 respectively together with additional primary school(s). A transport assessment for Ysgol Cwm Brombil was prepared by external consultants, a requirement of the planning application²³

²³ Planning application -

http://appsportal.npt.gov.uk/ords/idocs12/f?p=Planning:2:0::NO::P2_REFERENCE:P2016/1022

for the school. It addresses the transport management of pupils, including additional pupils from outside the current catchment area.

Should it be the case that pupils from the upper Afan Valley do not attend Ysgol Brombil, there are a number of alternative options for making use of the accommodation available, discussion of which is outside the scope of this report and which will be subject to separate consultations should the need arise.

Funding for a new school via the Welsh government's 21st Century School Programme requires that 50% of the costs are met by the Council. With limited resources the Council is required to make best use of the funding it has available and to deal with the highest priority schemes first. It will also need to be mindful of getting value for money from its capital build expenditure. Supporting a new build, small secondary school could not be considered to represent good value based on the business case for a scheme with disproportionately high costs.

12. Building condition and size

There is a Welsh Government calculation²⁴ that determines the number of pupils a school can accommodate. This calculation is used to determine the size of primary and secondary schools. Head teachers are involved in the calculation for their school and the results are reported to the Welsh Government annually. For Cymer Afan Comprehensive School the calculation shows that the school has capacity for 641 pupils and with 229 pupils on roll it could accommodate a further 412.

The Council regularly assesses the condition of school buildings in order to identify areas that need maintenance and repair together with any refurbishments that are required to keep the buildings operational, including access for people with disabilities. This work is then prioritised with the highest priority schemes being tackled first. The assessments are carried out by a surveyor in the Council's Environment Department. The Council's

²⁴ Measuring the capacity of schools in Wales
<https://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/111104measuringcapacityen.pdf>

surveys have been sampled and independently checked by private sector consultants appointed by the Welsh Government.

There are many more schools in Neath Port Talbot in need of maintenance and repair than the Council has funds to deal with. Even after the £123m joint investment in NPT schools through its Strategic School Improvement Programme and Band A of the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools Programme there will remain an estimated backlog of repair costs across the Council's school building portfolio of c.£75m despite spending c.£1.2m annually on maintenance and repair. The costs at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school amount to c.£3m. Maintenance and repair keep a school operational; in brief the work keeps the building safe, warm and watertight. Importantly, it does not provide a new facility that meets the standards expected at a new build school. The Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools Programme of funding is intended to deliver the new build / remodelled schools, and not maintenance and repair schemes. However, 50% of the costs of a new build / remodelled school has to be found by the Council. For the Council to make best use of its limited resources it is necessary to ensure that the resources it invests in schools are used efficiently and that projects are carefully selected to give best value for money. In line with the requirement of the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools Programme, schools with the poorest building conditions are given priority. Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School falls into this category.

All schools will have access to their condition surveys and are supported by a multi-disciplinary team of technical staff to manage maintenance issues. A dedicated building surveyor is assigned to the school to monitor and respond to building maintenance matters. Cymer Afan Comprehensive has had c.£370,000 of repair and maintenance works carried out since 2014.

Estyn is the education and training inspectorate for Wales. Its function is to provide an independent inspection and advice service on quality and standards in education and training provided in Wales. It does not comment or report specifically on maintenance and repair issues of school buildings.

In July 2016, the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys was set up to look at how investment in the Valleys is delivered in a joined up and strategic way with the aim of leading the regeneration and sustainable growth

of the valleys. In March 2018 the taskforce published a high-level delivery plan which outlines its priorities for the future, 'Our Valleys, Our Future'. Working groups have been set up to look at specific areas of the plan and each is led / chaired by a member of the taskforce. The plan does not make provision for funding the upkeep of school buildings or supporting school budgets.

At the present time no decision has been taken on what will happen to the building should the school close. Any future use will be considered within the context of the Council's corporate asset management process. While demolition or securing the site will incur costs these are likely to be one off rather than recurring costs.

13. Wider community

A Community Impact Assessment (CIA) has been undertaken for the purpose of providing information on the impact of the proposal on the local community's access to facilities and services currently available at the school. It has been prepared in line with the requirements of the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code. It is not to provide an opinion on the long term consequences of school closure as has been suggested by some consultees. The CIA has been prepared using a range of sources and evidence, including discussion with various partner organisations in the upper Afan Valley and the school, and it is usually the case that the consultation process provides further information all of which enables decision makers to have a fuller understanding of the possible consequences on communities as a result of school closure.

The CIA has found that there are opportunities to relocate community based activity from the school to alternative locations. These locations can be enhanced as appropriate with no loss of amenity to the wider community.

The CIA contains a comprehensive assessment of the facilities and services in the upper Afan Valley and while the need to understand and mitigate the impact of a school closure proposal on a community is a right and proper consideration, the deciding factor in determining school organisation proposals should be one of securing the best educational offer for pupils.

The proposal consults on the closure of the secondary school. It does not seek to remove education as a whole out of the area. The current four primary schools, which along with the secondary school make up the federation, are not currently under review and do not form part of this proposal. It is expected that these schools will remain federated and will continue to provide pupils and staff with the benefits of federation within the communities where they are sited.

The proposal is not intended to isolate the upper Afan Valley but rather to provide children and young people who reside there with greater opportunities and experiences than they currently have access to. There is no reason to suggest that by attending school in another part of Neath Port Talbot or elsewhere children and young people will no longer 'belong' to the community where they live. The Community Impact Assessment (CIA) highlights the fact that many community based activities and events are not reliant on the secondary school and so it is not apparent why it is held that these activities would not continue, or why children and young people who currently enjoy participating in them would not want to do so should they attend school elsewhere. Schools are open to pupils for 190 days of the year. Outside of the school day; that is, before and after school, weekends and during school holidays, secondary school pupils will be in the upper Afan Valley and available to make use of local facilities.

Even if implemented, there will still be four primary schools in the upper Afan Valley providing education for approx. 450 primary age children, together with the accompanying employment of teachers and support staff, and the delivery of support services. The Council's investment in education in the upper Afan Valley although modified, will continue. Similarly, the investment in secondary education continues with education provision being made for the pupils of the upper Afan Valley although delivered outside the upper Afan Valley.

It is already the case that pupils attend schools other than Cymer Afan Comprehensive, although this is currently a small number. Pupils from the upper Afan Valley attend secondary schools including Ysgol Bae Baglan, Maesteg School, Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Llangynwyd, and others for a variety of reasons. It is also the case that primary age pupils travel from the upper Afan Valley to Ysgol Cynwyd Sant in Maesteg and to schools across Neath Port Talbot including Blaenbaglan Primary School, Abbey Primary School,

Catwg Primary School and Tywyn Primary School. Children and young people do not only mix socially through their schooling as many will attend local after school groups or be part of wider community events. There is no reason why this wouldn't continue to be an important part of their lives should the proposal go forward. In other communities where school closures have taken place and where fears have existed that pupils would lose their sense of identity, it appears that this that this has not happened and that pupils continue to take part in community events.

The Valleys Taskforce Strategy is concerned with ensuring that progress is made against the following three key priorities – good quality jobs and the skills to do them, better public services and my local community. The 'Our Valleys, Our future' delivery plan sets out in detail how these priorities will be achieved, who will be involved, the expected benefits, and the timescales for completion. It is unlikely that this proposal will hinder any of the key priorities from being achieved in the upper Afan Valley as the existence of the secondary school neither prevents nor enables the development of the plan at the current time.

The proposed Afan Valley Adventure Resort is at the very early stages of development and does not have any direct relation to this proposal. There are no plans to sell the school land to the developers for the scheme.

The proposed development intends to create an adventure resort comprising 600 lodges, 100 bed hotel, adventure activities, restaurants and associated administration and parking, in two phases. The first phase which will involve the vast majority of the work will take at least two years to construct. Before any work commences there will need to be a range of planning permissions and conditions to be explored and put in place, which could take some considerable time. The developers have yet to submit a complete formal planning application. On the basis of the information that has been made available, the potential for the regeneration of local communities through job creation and attracting new homeowners seems limited. It has been suggested by consultees that the development will increase the pupil roll at Cymer Afan and that any decision regarding the future of secondary education in the upper Afan Valley should be deferred until the resort is in operation. The development is unlikely to have a direct impact on school places. Pupil numbers provided in the consultation document do not take any account of

increased numbers as a result of the development as there is no indication of what those numbers might be, or even whether there will be an increase at all. It is not clear whether the resort will indeed attract extra workforce into the upper Afan Valley or whether there are already people in the area able to fulfil the requirements of the positions needed. For information, the formula²⁵ used by the Council to estimate pupil numbers generated by housing developments suggests that to achieve 350 extra pupils would require in excess of 2000 new households, although there is currently under occupation of existing domestic dwelling stock.

There is nothing in the scoping application to indicate that education would be eligible for a financial contribution from this proposed development. Respondents have suggested that the development could result in schemes for pupils or school leavers of Cymer Afan Comprehensive to gain apprenticeships or work experience. Should the development progress then this should still be a future possibility which can be explored for the young people in the upper Afan Valley even though they may be attending a school elsewhere.

The Child Poverty Strategy for Wales has been taken into account by the Council and this proposal will contribute to its aims, particularly in relation to raising educational attainment.

The NPT Single Integrated Plan²⁶ seeks to help and support people fulfil their learning potential by implementing a structured programme of school re-organisation that delivers schools that are 'fit for purpose' and meet a 21st century standard.

The Single Integrated Plan also seeks raise standards; improve pupil outcomes; reduce surplus places and ensure that sufficient and appropriate school places are available and that schools are accessible to pupils. These improvements will take place in the context of ensuring that the provision of education within the County Borough is delivered in an efficient and cost effective manner.

²⁵ https://www.npt.gov.uk/PDF/ldp_written_statement_jan16.pdf

²⁶ https://www.npt.gov.uk/media/6872/sip1_2013_2023.pdf

Cymer Afan Comprehensive school is a large employer, although many of its employees live outside the upper Afan Valley. The Council has a good track record on redeployment and will be working hard to secure the future employment of staff at risk of redundancy.

Respondents have suggested that Cymer Afan Comprehensive school is a rural school and, therefore, protected from closure. The Council is aware of proposals by the Welsh Government to give added protection to rural schools, but this matter is still being consulted upon²⁷. This is likely to take the form of a presumption against closure subject to the outcome of robust local consultation. The Council believes that the current consultation on the: 'Future of Secondary Education in the upper Afan Valley' would meet the necessary standards required by the Welsh Government. It is the case that, under the draft proposals for protecting rural schools, no school within Neath Port Talbot would qualify for this added protection.

14. Consultation quality

Consultation on the future of secondary education in the upper Afan Valley follows the procedures required under the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code which specifies the type of school organisation activity on which the Council is required to consult and the process to be followed in conducting consultation. The Code also specifies the persons with whom the Council must consult and each consultee will have been contacted and have had the consultation document made available to them. In this regard, a school organisation proposal has an identified audience and that audience has been appropriately targeted in line with the Code. In addition to the requirements of the Code, face to face meetings were held with key stakeholders, namely: parents, pupils, staff and governors. There is no duty placed on the Council by the Code to hold such meetings but the Council recognises the contribution these can make to informing decision making. Similarly, there is no requirement to hold a meeting with the wider community but, again, the Council, anticipating local concerns and realising the benefit of community engagement, held a face to face meeting.

²⁷ <https://beta.gov.wales/school-organisation-code>

Throughout the consultation period the consultation document and associated papers were available on the Council's website located on the Council's Strategic School Improvement Programme webpage. The Council website's search facility provided an electronic link to the relevant documentation, using simple phrases such as: 'Consultation Cymer' or 'Consultation Afan', for example. Analysis of SSIP webpage activity shows a high level of 'page views'.

Information about the consultation on the future of secondary education in the upper Afan Valley appeared on the Council's website in the form of a press release of 3rd November 2017, which was also issued widely to press contacts. This was picked up by Media Wales and ran as the front page headline story of the South Wales Evening Post on Saturday 4th November. It also appeared in the Western Mail and online at Wales Online. Similar print and web coverage was given to an article on 17th November 2017 for which the Council provided a quote urging stakeholders to participate in the consultation. A further article was published in the Evening Post and online on 18th January 2018. The Council has also responded to requests from ITV and The Wave for details of the consultation, resulting in further broadcast and web coverage. Notice of the meeting with the community was both 'tweeted' and posted on the Council's Facebook page on 30th January 2018, which included a link to the Strategic School Improvement Programme webpage.

The turnout for all meetings, particularly the parents and wider community, suggested that the relevant information had reached the intended audience and there was an appropriate level of stakeholder engagement.

Separately, consultation took place on a proposal to close Dyffryn School and Groes Primary School and create a new 3-16 school in a new build on the current Dyffryn upper school site between October and December 2016. Parents and pupils of Groes Primary and Dyffryn School together with other stakeholders were consulted on the establishment of Ysgol Cwm Brombil; consultation which would have included the number of secondary age pupils the school would accommodate. The economic case for opening Ysgol Cwm Brombil is not dependent on the future of secondary education in the upper Afan Valley. Although the pupil capacity of Ysgol Cwm Brombil presents an opportunity to provide for pupils from outside the Port Talbot / Margam area,

consultation on that matter could be considered separately as is the case with this proposal. In this respect it is no different to considering a long established school with surplus places.

Ysgol Cwm Brombil is not yet open; this is scheduled for September 2018. As such, preparations for its opening are being managed by a temporary governing body set up for this specific purpose. The temporary governing body, which includes parent and community governors, has been consulted on the 'Future of secondary education in the upper Afan Valley' and has expressed support for the Council's proposal.

It has been suggested that Neath Port Talbot Council cannot be an impartial judge of the responses it receives from the consultation as it has a vested interest in the closure of Cymer Afan Comprehensive School in order to satisfy the requirements of the business plan for Ysgol Cwm Brombil. Officers of the Council do not agree with this assertion.

Major school reorganisation, such as establishing a new build school to replace existing schools, comprises three main areas of activity, namely: securing the necessary funding, consulting with stakeholders on the proposal for change and ensuring relevant planning permissions are granted. In addition, relevant Council committee approvals are needed.

In the case of Ysgol Cwm Brombil, funding for the new build school relies on a combination of Welsh Government 21st Century Schools capital grant support and match funding from the Council. The Council's match funding element is not dependent on the proposal currently being consulted upon, i.e. the closure of Cymer Afan Comprehensive school. The current consultation on the future of secondary education in the upper Afan Valley is separate to the business case process and a decision on the outcome of that consultation does not impact on the establishment of Ysgol Cwm Brombil. In the opinion of officers the decision-making of elected Members is, therefore, not compromised.

The consultation document is required under the statutory code to contain specific information on a range of technical matters - education, building condition, finance, etc. It may well be the case that some of these issues will require the use of professional terminology and vocabulary specifically relating to the subject area which some consultees may not readily recognise or

understand. One of the purposes in arranging 'face to face' consultation meetings is to give consultees the opportunity to ask questions about the document and to seek clarification on any matters about which they are unclear. Additionally officers have been available throughout the consultation period to respond to telephone or email queries regarding any aspect of the proposal and consultation document, including explaining educational terminology. No specific queries seeking explanation of terminology have been received.

Comments have been received which express the view that this consultation process has not provided consultees with sufficient information to enable an intelligent consideration and response, and that it is an unlawful process in that it has not followed proper policies and procedures, and has not complied with fairness and equality rules. Both this consultation process; namely, the consultation on the future of education in the upper Afan Valley and the consultation for Ysgol Cwm Brombil have followed the procedures set down by the Welsh Government under the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013²⁸ and School Organisation Code²⁹. All requests for extra information have been met by officers and queries received have been responded to. The consultation process has resulted in over 3000 written responses, along with a considerable number of verbal responses through consultation meetings, suggesting that it has been possible for a significant number of people to consider the proposal and to make a response.

A range of options were presented in the consultation document along with the preferred option of officers giving sufficient reasons to allow consultees to give intelligent consideration and an intelligent response. It is recognised the consultation process should be undertaken when proposals are still at a formative stage. This is the case with this consultation as the Council will conscientiously take into account the responses before finalising its decision. As such the views of consultees are able to influence the decision making process. An undertaking has been given that alternative proposals brought forward as part of the consultation process will be fully explored and will help elected Members take a reasoned and rational decision as to how the future of secondary education in the upper Afan Valley is to be progressed. It will be

²⁸ School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 -

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2013/1/contents/enacted>

²⁹ School Organisation Code - www.assembly.wales/Laid%20Documents/SUB-LD9303%20-%20School%20Organisation%20Code-29042013-245748/sub-ld9303-e-English.pdf

for elected Members to decide on the most appropriate proposal, if any, to take forward. Contrary to a view held by the federated governing body, the Catholic and Church in Wales Diocesan Authorities were advised of the consultation and invited to comment.

The document contains information on all schools affected by the proposal and is considered by officers to be balanced and even-handed, containing sufficient information on the schools to enable consultees to gain a view of quality and standards of education. Estyn, the inspection body responsible for monitoring standards of education in Wales has been consulted on the proposal for the upper Afan Valley and, specifically on the content of the consultation document, has commented that appropriate reference is made to the outcomes of the school's most recent Estyn inspection and on the current performance and the prospects for improvement of the school

The School Organisation Code requires that the consultation document must be issued during the term time of the schools affected and that consultees must be given at least 42 days to respond to the document. The consultation period in this case ran from December 11th 2017 to 14th February 2018, with the period for consultation exceeding this requirement.

A child's rights impact assessment (CRIA) has not been completed for this proposal as it is not required. In Wales, CRIAs have been in place for a number of years and, although not mandatory, are seen as a primary tool for delivering Ministerial duties on children's rights.

In 2011, the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure placed a duty on Welsh Ministers to have due regard to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to undertake this duty in a number of ways including through CRIAs which can cover policies, legislation, regulations, strategies, projects and programmes. From 2012 to date, around 260 CRIAs have been undertaken across Welsh Government.

While a CRIA has not been completed, this consultation has taken into account the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The School Organisation Code requires that the Council makes suitable arrangements to consult with the pupils of any school which is affected by school organisation proposals and, where possible, children and young

people who are likely to attend that school. All pupil consultations conducted as part of the Council's Strategic School Improvement Programme are conducted within the framework provided by the National Standards for Children and Young People's Participation in Wales and adhere to the principle that 'Children have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account' - Article 12: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Pupil consultations and related documents in Neath Port Talbot follow the guidance issued by Welsh Government in the: 'School organisation: consultation with children and young people' guidance document 2013³⁰. The guidance gives details of good practice which includes meeting with pupil representatives (usually School Council members), making sure that pupils know how to make their views known, that they are aware of the school organisation process and the specific timetable for key events, e.g. the dates of the consultation period. A separate consultation document for pupils is not a statutory requirement; however it is considered to be good practice and is an established part of the process in Neath Port Talbot. A pupil consultation document was made available for this proposal for the schools to use with their pupils as was felt appropriate.

In addition, 'face to face' meetings were held with pupils. Extra copies of the pupil consultation document were available at these meetings but few pupils took them, suggesting that they either already had copies or felt confident that they already understood enough about the proposal and didn't need them. At each meeting it was stressed that their enquiries, comments and opinions were important and pupils were given full details of how to respond to the consultation. Over 130 comment forms or letters were received specifically from pupils across the upper Afan Valley, suggesting that pupils were aware of the consultation process and had received sufficient information to be able to make an informed response.

Comments have been received which claim that the pupil consultation document is 'of poor quality' and does not present all the information contained in the full consultation document. As noted above the pupil

³⁰Guidance document 2013 - <https://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/131113-school-organisation-consultation-with-children-and-young-people-en.pdf>

consultation document is not a statutory part of the process and so does not need to contain the level of information required in the full document, however the document does have regard to the list of matters set out in the School Organisation Code presented in an accessible way for the intended audience, which in this case is mainly older primary and secondary school pupils. The general format of pupil consultation documents has been refined following the involvement of education professionals working with pupils of all abilities in the primary and secondary sectors across Neath Port Talbot schools and is generally considered to be appropriate. Careful consideration is given to its content - too much information can make it difficult for some pupils to access even with the help of an adult, so not all of the aspects of the full consultation document are included. It does contain information on where to access the full consultation document should pupils so wish, as well as contact details for pupils to get in touch with officers directly should they choose to do so.

Concern has been expressed about lack of information regarding safeguarding staff salaries. The consultation document specifically addresses this matter³¹, setting out the potential impact on staff and citing the Council's past record on supporting staff in such situations. Until it is decided to implement this proposal, it would not be appropriate to hold discussions on the circumstances of individual members of staff.

15. Finance

Schools are funded for their 'day to day' running mainly from money allocated directly by the Council and by means of Welsh Government grants that become available from time to time. Even though federated, the five schools in the upper Afan Valley receive individual school budgets. The money allocated to a school by the Council becomes that school's money to manage in the way that it feels best in order to meet the educational needs of pupils. This applies to individual schools and to a group of schools managed as a federation, such as the five schools in the upper Afan Valley federation. It is the head teacher and the federated governing body that decides how that money is spent.

³¹ Consultation document page 10 – Impact on school based staff.

Federating the schools in the upper Afan Valley and operating them under the management of one governing body has allowed the budgets for the five individual schools to be 'pooled' and the money to be used where needed most across the federation. Federation has meant more resources for teaching and learning as all five schools are funded as though there was a head teacher employed at each school. With only the cost of a single head teacher to meet, the remaining money can be used elsewhere in the schools. Without federating, it is likely that some of the schools would have had difficulty managing the financial pressures brought about by falling school rolls combined with small numbers of pupils on roll. There is much to be gained by the four primary schools remaining in a federated arrangement should the secondary school close. The cost of providing education to secondary age pupils is greater than that of primary. This is because more specialist provision, materials and equipment is required at secondary school level. Averaging the 'per pupil' cost of the primary and secondary schools in the federation would not give a true reflection of the funding needs of Cymer Afan Comprehensive school pupils. It would also have the unintended consequence of over inflating the cost of providing primary education, bringing the value for money for the primary schools into question. School budgets are determined, for the most part, by pupil numbers on roll.

Funding the five schools by way of a federation is an investment by the Council in keeping education in the upper Afan Valley. Added to which the schools also benefit from small school funding supplement and protection. The level of funding per pupil is generous compared to other schools in the County Borough. Despite a view held by some consultees, the Council's proposal is not about cost saving as the money will be reinvested within education. The efficiencies from educating secondary age pupils from the upper Afan Valley at Ysgol Cwm Brombil will be ring fenced for reinvestment within education. As such, there is no reduction in education expenditure overall. Cost is not more important than quality but delivering education has a cost and this needs to be more equitably distributed between all pupils in the County Borough. The levels of need experienced in the upper Afan Valley are similarly present in other areas of NPT.

Home to school travel is estimated to cost an additional c.£76k as a result of this proposal and it has been suggested that this money could be used to improve the fabric of the existing school. The estimated cost of repair at

Cymer Afan Comprehensive school is £3m. At £76k annually, it would take almost 40 years to cover this cost. In the Council's proposal the additional transport costs would be offset by the savings from 'per pupil' funding at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school. Home to school travel costs are paid for directly by the Council. Other travel costs, approved by a school, are met from that school's budget.

The Council receives an allocation of money each year from the Welsh Government to fund education, including schools. This is, in part, based on actual and forecasted pupil numbers for all schools. The money which the Council sets aside for schools is distributed to individual schools by a formula with the money being shared in an open and transparent way. Schools are regularly consulted on the formula that the Council uses. There is a mechanism in the secondary schools' formula that provides additional money to Cymer Afan Comprehensive as it is a small school. In addition, there are grants allocated for specific purposes. In the current financial year, pupils at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school receive £6,822 per pupil compared to the average for other comprehensive schools of £4,245. This compares to £7,111 per pupil and an average of £4,476 for the previous financial year. Last year the school also received a pupil development grant³² of £94,300, an education improvement grant of £17,382 and a Welsh in education grant of £1,369. (In the 2018/2019 financial year the school will receive a pupil development grant of £94,300, an education improvement grant of £15,000 and a Welsh in education grant of £1,344.)

Access to wind farm grants has been proposed as a means of meeting the high costs of education in the upper Afan Valley. The most significant of the wind farm funds is that of Pen Y Cymoedd Wind Farm. Officers have met with representatives of the Wind Farm's Community Fund to explore opportunities for partnership working and have been advised that the Fund cannot support activities which are the statutory responsibility of the Council, such as funding schools. The Community Fund currently supports education based projects in schools, but these are additional to the statutory functions and funding responsibilities of the Council. It is possible that the Wind Farm and the Council could engage in a partnership to deliver projects such as the provision of a community library in a community hub setting. Shared facilities financed

³² Welsh Government financial support for reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment

in this way could bring revenue and capital cost benefits but these would fall far short of the funding needed to effectively support the running of a school.

Both the potential cost of redundancies and the additional cost of home to school travel were addressed in the consultation document³³.

16. Alternative school organisation

Consultees have requested that consideration be given to a range of options for alternative school organisation in the upper Afan Valley. These consisted of options that involved new school builds, the remodelling of existing premises and combinations of both, together with proposals for a hub of community services. Each option has been individually assessed, the evaluations are set out in the pages that follow. A number of the issues raised and the subsequent responses are common across the various options. For clarity they have been included and repeated as necessary in individual assessments. For the sake of completeness, additional options for school organisation have also been considered.

Guidance on accommodation and external area specifications for mainstream schools are set out in Building Bulletins³⁴. The key components of a secondary school comprise: teaching areas (general classrooms, practical lesson areas and performance spaces, etc.); halls (main hall, sports hall an activity studio, etc.); learning resource areas (library, learning support, SEN resource base, etc.); staff and administration (staff room, reception, admin & reprographics, etc.); dining (kitchen; dining area, etc.), toilets and personal care (pupil, staff, visitor toilet areas, hygiene rooms, changing rooms, etc.) and storage (materials preparation, equipment, instruments, etc.). The assessments that follow are based on Building Bulletins 98 & 99, the space allocation for primary and secondary schools adopted by the Welsh Government for grant funding purposes³⁵. This is a basic space standard which is less than the Council would ordinarily seek to build. The specifications in the Building Bulletins only allow for the accommodation needs of a school and not for the requirements of other service providers.

³³ Consultation document pages 9 & 29 – Impact on travel arrangements & Financial overview

³⁴ Building Bulletin issues 98 and 99 - briefing frameworks for secondary and primary school building projects: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/building-bulletin-98-and-99-school-project-briefing-frameworks>

³⁵ 21st Century Schools Programme - Band B, capital grant funding

Option A: a new 11-16 English-medium school to replace Cymer Afan Comp., built on existing site

This proposal would deliver a 21st century facility in the upper Afan Valley, removing any requirement to travel outside the valley for English-medium secondary education. It would also remove the backlog maintenance and repair costs associated with the existing Cymer Afan Comprehensive School as well as addressing surplus places.

In order to evaluate this proposal a new secondary school built to 21st Century Schools Programme construction and space standards has been assessed and costed. Such a build would provide the necessary classrooms, specialist rooms and accompanying indoor and outdoor facilities and associated spaces expected at a new build secondary school.

The assessment has been based on a school for approx. 250 pupils³⁶ aged 11-16, to be built on the existing Cymer Afan Comprehensive school site. To avoid unnecessary doubling-up of provision, the grass playing field used by the school – the red field, together with the floodlit ATP & sports hall located at the Cymer Afan Primary school site have been included in the calculations.

A new school of 250 pupils requires an external area of approx. 27,230m² together with 3,925m² of accommodation, although this could be reduced to approx. 3,325m² by utilising the existing sports hall.

The Cymer Afan Comprehensive school site together with the grass playing field and the floodlit ATP & sports hall covers an area of approx. 30,800m². As such, the secondary school site when combined with the facilities available at the primary school site could be considered to be sufficient in size to accommodate a new build school.

The build only costs associated with this proposal (accommodation & external areas) are estimated at c.£9.7m. However, this estimate does not include additional costs resulting from the demolition of the existing buildings; asbestos removal; remedial work identified during site investigations; meeting modern space and access requirements for car parking/bus bays; and the hire

³⁶ Assumes an element of projected growth – table 4, consultation document

of temporary classrooms for approx. 250 pupils which may be required during the build process. These works and costs have not been assessed at this stage because approval to progress this scheme would be needed to justify the fees that would be incurred.

Delivery of this proposal would rely on capital funding for which business case approval would be needed in order to access Welsh Government 21st Century Schools Programme grant funding.

This proposal does not address the inequity in per pupil funding resulting from the relatively small number of secondary pupils on roll - a year on year recurring revenue cost, nor the teaching and learning challenges presented by a small secondary school.

The 2018/19 budget share for Cymer Afan Comprehensive School is £1,547,000, equating to £6,822 per pupil, which is approx. 60% higher than the average for secondary schools in the County Borough at £4,245.

It would also remove the potential for redundancy costs.

Option B: a new 11-16 English-medium school to replace Cymer Afan Comp., built on existing site and to include secondary age pupils from Ysgol Cwm Brombil

This proposal would deliver a 21st century facility in the upper Afan Valley, removing any requirement to travel outside the valley for English-medium secondary education. Pupils would benefit from being part of a larger school community. It would also remove the backlog maintenance and repair costs associated with the existing Cymer Afan Comprehensive school, as well as addressing surplus places.

In order to evaluate this proposal a new secondary school built to 21st Century Schools Programme construction and space standards has been assessed and costed. Such a build would provide the necessary classrooms, specialist rooms and accompanying indoor and outdoor facilities and associated spaces expected at a new build secondary school.

The assessment has been based on an estimated combined secondary school roll for Cymer Afan Comprehensive and Ysgol Cwm Brombil of approx. 1250 pupils aged 11-16, with the new school being built on the existing Cymer Afan Comprehensive school site. To avoid unnecessary doubling-up of provision, the grass playing field used by the school – the red field, together with the floodlit ATP & sports hall located at the Cymer Afan Primary school site have been included in the calculations.

A new school of 1250 pupils requires an external area of approx. 71,750m². Additionally, approx. 10,234m² of accommodation would be required although this could be reduced to approx. 9,634m² by utilising the existing sports hall.

The Cymer Afan Comprehensive school site together with the grass playing field and the floodlit ATP & sports hall cover an area of approx. 30,800m². As such, the secondary school site even when combined with the facilities available at the primary school site is insufficient in size to accommodate the required new build school.

The build only costs associated with this proposal (accommodation & external areas) are estimated at c.£29m. However, this estimate does not include additional costs resulting from the demolition of the existing buildings at Cymmer; asbestos removal; any remedial work identified during site investigations; meeting modern space and access requirements for car parking/bus bays; and the hire of temporary classrooms for approx. 250 pupils, required during the build process. Also not included is an assessment of the travel costs and traffic impact associated with transporting 1000 extra pupils daily, equivalent to at least 13/14 coaches additional to those already needed for pupils from the upper Afan Valley. These works and costs have not been assessed at this stage because approval to progress this scheme would be needed to justify the fees that would be incurred.

This proposal would benefit from economies of scale and address the inequity in per pupil funding that currently exists.

The 2018/19 Budget Share for a similar size school would be £4,478,000, equating to £3,597 per pupil compared to a sector average of £4,245.

There are potential redundancy costs associated with this option.

However, such a proposal would undermine the £30m investment in the new build, 21st century, state of the art, school at Margam - Ysgol Cwm Brombil. This school is currently under construction as a 3-16 school and is due to open later this year, September 2018. Transferring provision of secondary education from Ysgol Cwm Brombil to the upper Afan Valley will significantly impact on the primary phase at this 'all-through' school.

Delivery of this proposal would rely on capital funding for which business case approval would be needed in order to access Welsh Government 21st Century Schools Programme grant funding.

Option C: a new 11-16 English-medium school to replace Cymer Afan Comp., built on existing site and to include pupils from Cefn Saeson Comp.

This proposal would deliver a 21st century facility in the upper Afan Valley, removing any requirement to travel outside the valley for English-medium secondary education. Pupils would benefit from being part of a larger school community. It would also remove the backlog maintenance and repair costs associated with the existing Cymer Afan Comprehensive and Cefn Saeson Comprehensive schools as well as addressing surplus places.

In order to evaluate this proposal a new secondary school built to 21st Century Schools Programme construction and space standards has been assessed and costed. Such a build would provide the necessary classrooms, specialist rooms and accompanying indoor and outdoor facilities and associated spaces expected at a new build secondary school.

The assessment has been based on an estimated combined secondary school roll for Cymer Afan Comprehensive and Cefn Saeson Comprehensive of approx. 1000 pupils aged 11-16, with the new school being built on the existing Cymer Afan Comprehensive site. To avoid unnecessary doubling-up of provision, the grass playing field used by the school – the red field, together with the floodlit ATP & sports hall located at the Cymer Afan Primary school site have been included in the calculations.

A new school of 1000 pupils requires an external area of approx. 60,000m². Additionally, approx. 8,550m² of accommodation would be needed although this could be reduced to approx. 7,950m² by utilising the existing sports hall.

The Cymer Afan Comprehensive site together with the existing grass playing field and the floodlit ATP & sports hall cover an area of approx. 30,800m². As such, the secondary school site even when combined with the facilities available at the primary school is insufficient in size to accommodate the required new build school.

The build only costs associated with this proposal (accommodation & external areas) are estimated at c.£23.8m. However, this estimate does not include additional costs resulting from the demolition of the existing buildings at Cymmer; asbestos removal; any remedial work identified during site investigations; meeting modern space and access requirements for car parking/bus bays; and the hire of temporary classrooms for approx. 250 pupils, required during the build process. Also not included is an assessment of the travel costs and traffic impact associated with transporting 750 extra pupils daily, equivalent to at least 10/11 coaches additional to those already needed for pupils from the upper Afan Valley. These works and costs have not been assessed at this stage because approval to progress this scheme would be needed to justify the fees that would be incurred.

This proposal would benefit from economies of scale and address the inequity in per pupil funding that currently exists.

The 2018/19 Budget Share for a similar size school would be approx. £4,245,000, equating to £4,245 per pupil which is the same as the sector average. There are potential redundancy costs associated with this option.

However, such a proposal would undermine the Council's plans for a new build, 21st century, state of the art, school at Cimla, Neath to replace Cefn Saeson Comprehensive.

Delivery of this proposal would rely on capital funding for which business case approval would be needed in order to access Welsh Government 21st Century Schools Programme grant funding. Cefn Season Comprehensive school has been included in the Council's 21st Century Schools Band B capital grant

funding submission to the Welsh Government for a new build new school on the existing site.

Option D a new 11-16 English-medium school to replace Cymer Afan Comp., built on existing site and to include additional pupils from Maesteg Comp.

This proposal would deliver a 21st century facility in the upper Afan Valley, removing any requirement to travel outside the valley for English-medium secondary education. Pupils would benefit from being part of a larger school community. It would also remove the backlog maintenance and repair costs associated with the existing Cymer Afan Comprehensive school site as well as addressing surplus places.

Importantly, Bridgend County Borough Council is the local authority with responsibility for Maesteg Comprehensive, a relatively new build school constructed in 2008 with over 1100 pupils on roll including a 6th Form. Decisions about its future rest with that Council - not with Neath Port Talbot. Also, this proposal includes provision for a 6th Form and, as such, it does not align with this Council's tertiary education policy where 16 – 19 age education is delivered at a local college³⁷.

In order to evaluate this proposal a new secondary school built to 21st Century Schools Programme construction and space standards has been assessed and costed. Such a build would provide the necessary classrooms, specialist rooms and accompanying indoor and outdoor facilities and associated spaces expected at a new build secondary school.

The assessment has been based on an estimated combined secondary school roll for Cymer Afan Comprehensive and Maesteg Comprehensive, including its sixth form, of approx. 1350 pupils aged 11-18 with the new school being built on the existing Cymer Afan Comprehensive site. To avoid unnecessary doubling-up of provision, the grass playing field used by the school – the red field, together with the floodlit ATP & sports hall located at the Cymer Afan Primary school site have been included in the calculations.

³⁷ NPTC Group, except for Welsh-medium and Faith school education

A new school of 1350 pupils (incl. 6th form) requires an external site area of approx. 76,450m². Additionally, approx. 11,585m² of accommodation would be required although this could be reduced to approx. 10,985m² by utilising the existing sports hall.

The Cymer Afan Comprehensive school site together with the grass playing field and the floodlit ATP & sports hall cover an area of approx. 30,800m². As such, the secondary school site even when combined with the facilities available at the primary school is insufficient in size to accommodate the required new build school.

The build only costs associated with this proposal (accommodation & external areas) are estimated at c.£32.9m. However, this estimate does not include additional costs resulting from the demolition of the existing buildings at Cymmer; asbestos removal; any remedial work identified during site investigations; meeting modern space and access requirements for car parking/bus bays; and the hire of temporary classrooms for approx. 250 pupils, required during the build process. Also not included is an assessment of the travel costs and traffic impact associated with transporting 1100 extra pupils daily, equivalent to at least 15/16 coaches additional to those already needed for pupils from the upper Afan Valley. These works and costs have not been assessed at this stage because approval to progress this scheme would be needed to justify the fees that would be incurred.

This proposal would benefit from economies of scale and address the inequity in per pupil funding that currently exists.

The 2018/19 Budget Share for a similar size school would be approx. £5,731,000, equating to £4,245 per pupil which is the same as the sector average. There are potential redundancy costs associated with this option.

Delivery of this proposal would rely on capital funding for which business case approval would be needed in order to access Welsh Government 21st Century Schools Programme grant funding.

Option E: a new 3-16 English-medium school to replace Cymer Afan Comp. and the partner primary schools of Croeserw, Cymer

Afan, Glyncorrwg and Pen Afan, built on the Cymer Afan Comp. site

This proposal would deliver a 21st century facility in the upper Afan Valley for secondary and primary age pupils; removing the backlog maintenance, repair costs and surplus places associated with the existing school sites and any requirement to travel outside the valley for English-medium secondary education.

In order to evaluate this proposal a new 3-16 school built to 21st Century Schools Programme construction and space standards has been assessed and costed. Such a build would provide the necessary classrooms, specialist rooms and accompanying indoor and outdoor facilities and associated spaces expected of a new build 3-16 school.

The assessment has been based on a school for approx. 700 pupils to be built on the existing Cymer Afan Comprehensive site. To avoid unnecessary doubling-up of provision, the grass playing field used by the school – the red field, together with the floodlit ATP & sports hall located at the Cymer Afan Primary school site have been included in the calculations.

A new school of 700 pupils (250 aged 11- 16 & 450 aged 3-11) requires an external area of approx. 34,630m². Additionally, approx. 6,290m² of accommodation would be required although this could be reduced to approx. 5,690m² by utilising the existing sports hall.

Cymer Afan Comprehensive school site

The Cymer Afan Comprehensive site together with the grass playing field and the floodlit ATP & sports hall covers an area of approx. 30,800m². As such, the secondary school site even when combined with the facilities available offsite is insufficient in size to accommodate the required new build school.

The build only costs associated with this proposal (accommodation & external areas) are estimated at c.£17m. However, this estimate does not include additional costs resulting from the demolition of the existing buildings at Cymmer (and other sites as appropriate); asbestos removal; remedial work identified during site investigations; meeting modern space and access requirements for car parking/bus bays; and the hire of temporary classrooms

for approx. 250 pupils, required during the build process. Also not included is an assessment of the travel costs and traffic impact associated with transporting extra primary age pupils, 4/5 coaches daily which could be in addition to transport for secondary age pupils from the upper Afan Valley. These works and costs have not been assessed at this stage because approval to progress this scheme would be needed to justify the fees that would be incurred.

Cymer Afan Comprehensive and Cymer Afan Primary school sites combined

The Cymer Afan Comprehensive site together with the Cymer Afan Primary school site cover an area of approx. 41,180m². By retaining and utilising accommodation at Cymer Afan Primary school, a category B condition building, approx. 5,285m² of additional accommodation would be required. When the present site is combined with the facilities available at the primary school, including existing accommodation, sufficient area is available for the new school, which would then be a mix of new build and existing premises.

The build only costs associated with this scheme (accommodation & external areas) are estimated at c.£16m, although as with the estimate above there are key elements not included.

Either of the above schemes would benefit from economies of scale with fewer sites to manage and maintain. However, a single 3-16 school in this form would undermine the £5.2m investment in the new build primary school at Blaengwynfi, Pen Afan Primary.

Neither of these schemes addresses the inequity in per pupil funding resulting from the relatively small number of secondary pupils on roll - a year on year recurring revenue cost, nor the teaching and learning challenges presented by a small secondary school.

The 2018/19 budget share for the secondary phase of this school would be £1,547,000, equating to £6,822 per pupil, compared to the secondary sector average of £4,245.

The 2018/19 budget share for the primary phase of this school would be £1,382,000, equating to £3,162 per pupil funding, compared to the primary

sector average of £3,625. This compares with the combined per pupil funding for the four existing primary schools of £4,128.

There are some potential redundancy costs associated with this option.

Delivery of either scheme would rely on capital funding for which business case approval would be needed in order to access Welsh Government 21st Century Schools Programme grant funding.

A separate proposal suggested building a new 3-16 school to replace Cymer Afan Comprehensive and the partner primary schools of Croeserw, Cymer Afan and Glyncorrwg. This would retain the new Pen Afan Primary school and reduce the site size requirements and build costs. Whereas this would support the investment at Blaengwynfi, it would result in additional costs incurred in managing and maintaining two schools on separate sites.

Option F: refurbish Cymer Afan Comp. and relocate the partner primary schools of Croeserw, Cymer Afan, Glyncorrwg and Pen Afan to the remodelled Cymer Afan Comp. site

This proposal would not deliver a 21st century facility in the upper Afan Valley for secondary or primary age pupils. It would, however, remove the backlog maintenance, repair costs and surplus places associated with the existing school sites and any requirement to travel outside the valley for English-medium secondary education.

In order to evaluate this proposal building bulletin space standards have been adopted to ensure the necessary classrooms, specialist rooms and accompanying indoor and outdoor facilities and associated spaces could be delivered.

The assessment has been based on a school for approx. 700 pupils to be built on the existing Cymer Afan Comprehensive site. To avoid unnecessary doubling-up of provision, the grass playing field used by the school – the red field, together with the floodlit ATP & sports hall located at the Cymer Afan Primary school site have been included in the calculations.

A school of 700 pupils (250 aged 11- 16 & 450 aged 3-11) requires an external area of approx. 34,630m². Additionally, approx. 6,290m² of accommodation would be required although this could be reduced to approx. 5,690m² by utilising the existing sports hall.

Cymer Afan Comprehensive school site

The Cymer Comprehensive school site together with the grass playing field and the floodlit ATP & sports hall cover an area of approx. 30,800m². As such, the secondary school site even when combined with the facilities available offsite is insufficient in size to accommodate the required remodelled school.

Backlog maintenance and accessibility costs at Cymer Afan Comprehensive are estimated at c.£3m. However, establishing a 3-16 school on a secondary school site will require extensive remodelling in order to convert secondary school premises into accommodation, internal and external, suitable for primary school children. The costs of remodelling is estimated³⁸ at c.£15m.

Furthermore, this estimated cost does not include costs resulting from demolition of existing buildings at Cymmer (and other sites as appropriate); asbestos removal; remedial work identified during site investigations; meeting modern space and access requirements for car parking/bus bays; and the hire of temporary classrooms for approx. 250 pupils, required during the build process. Also not included is an assessment of the travel costs and traffic impact associated with transporting extra primary age pupils, 4/5 coaches daily which could be in addition to transport for secondary age pupils from the upper Afan Valley. These works and costs have not been assessed at this stage because approval to progress this scheme would be needed to justify the fees that would be incurred.

Providing a primary school environment in remodelled secondary school buildings is likely to be costly as accommodation will need to be made suitable for younger children, particularly in terms of being able to adequately deliver the Foundation Phase where the curriculum needs and accommodation requirements are significantly different to secondary phase education. The building condition of the existing secondary school, adaptability, access challenges and general layout required for such a wholesale primary phase

³⁸ Welsh Government cost calculator for major remodelling

remodelling militate against this proposal. It is unlikely that any significant financial benefits would be realised on such a scheme and a new build school would probably prove to be the preferred option on grounds of affordability and lifecycle costs.

Cymer Afan Comprehensive and Cymer Afan Primary school sites combined

The Cymer Comprehensive school site together with the Cymer Afan Primary school site covers an area of approx. 41,180m². By retaining and utilising accommodation at Cymer Afan Primary school approx. 5,285m² of additional accommodation would be required. When the existing site is combined with the facilities available at the primary school, including existing accommodation, sufficient area is available for the new school. This would then be a mix of remodelled and existing premises across two sites, the existing secondary and the primary.

The build only costs associated with this scheme (accommodation & external areas) are estimated at c.£14m, although as with the estimate above there are key elements not included.

If delivered, either scheme would benefit from economies of scale with fewer sites to manage and maintain. However, a single 3-16 school in this form would undermine the £5.2m investment in the new build primary school at Blaengwynfi, Pen Afan Primary.

Neither scheme addresses the inequity in per pupil funding resulting from the relatively small number of secondary pupils on roll - a year on year recurring revenue cost, nor the teaching and learning challenges presented by a small secondary school.

The 2018/19 Budget Share for Cymer Afan Comprehensive school would be £1,547,000, equating to £6,822 per pupil funding, compared to the secondary sector average of £4,245.

The 2018/19 Budget Share for a similar size Primary school would be £1,382,000 equating to £3,162 per pupil funding, compared to the primary sector average of £3,625. This compares with the combined per pupil funding for the four existing primary schools of £4,128.

There are some potential redundancy costs associated with this option.

Delivery of either scheme would rely on capital funding for which business case approval would be needed in order to access Welsh Government 21st Century Schools Programme grant funding.

A separate proposal suggested building a new 3-16 school to replace Cymer Afan Comprehensive and the partner primary schools of Croeserw, Cymer Afan and Glyncorwg. This would retain the new Pen Afan Primary school, and reduce the site requirements and build costs of this proposal. Whereas this would support the investment at Blaengwynfi, it would result in additional costs incurred in managing and maintaining two schools on three separate sites.

Option G: a new 11-16 English-medium school to replace Cefn Saeson Comp., built on existing site and to include additional pupils from Cymer Afan Comp.

This proposal would deliver a 21st century facility for secondary age pupils from Cimla, Neath, and the upper Afan Valley. It would remove the backlog maintenance, repair costs and surplus places associated with both existing school sites. Whereas it would not retain secondary education in the upper Afan Valley, travel time and distance for pupils would be slightly less than the journey to Ysgol Cwm Brombil proposed in the consultation. Cefn Saeson Comprehensive school is approx. 9 miles from the furthest community in the upper Afan Valley. Cymer Afan Comprehensive school would still close although, compared to the Council's consultation proposal, the date of closure would probably be delayed while the new school at Cimla, is being constructed.

In order to evaluate this proposal a new secondary school built to 21st Century Schools Programme construction and space standards has been assessed and costed. Such a build would provide the necessary classrooms, specialist rooms and accompanying indoor and outdoor facilities and associated spaces expected at a new build secondary school.

The assessment has been based on an estimated combined secondary school roll for Cymer Afan Comprehensive and Cefn Saeson Comprehensive of approx. 1000 pupils aged 11-16, with the new school being built on the existing Cefn Saeson Comprehensive site.

A new school of 1000 pupils requires an external site area of approx. 60,000m². Additionally, approx. 8,550m² of accommodation would be required.

The present site covers an area of approx. 61,289m². As such, the secondary school site is insufficient in size to accommodate the required new build school and the acquisition of additional land would appear to be necessary.

The build only costs associated with this proposal (accommodation & external areas) are estimated at c.£25.5m. However, this estimate does not include additional costs resulting from the demolition of the existing buildings at Cimla; asbestos removal; any remedial work identified during site investigations; meeting modern space and access requirements for car parking/bus bays; and the hire of temporary classrooms which may be required during the build process. This also does not include an assessment of the travel costs and traffic impact associated with transporting 250³⁹ extra pupils daily, equivalent to at least 3/4 coaches. These works and costs have not been assessed at this stage because approval to progress this scheme would be needed to justify the fees that would be incurred.

This proposal would benefit from economies of scale and address the inequity in per pupil funding that currently exists at secondary age level.

The 2018/19 Budget Share for a similar size school would be approx. £4,245k equating to £4,245 per pupil which is the same as the sector average.

There are potential redundancy costs associated with this option.

Delivery of this proposal would rely on capital funding for which business case approval would be needed in order to access Welsh Government 21st Century Schools Programme grant funding.

³⁹ Assumes an element of projected growth – table 4, consultation document

Option H: a new 3-16 English-medium school to replace Cymer Afan Comp. and the partner primary schools of Croeserw, Cymer Afan, Glyncorrwg and Pen Afan, built on the Croeserw Primary school site

This proposal for a 3-16 school at Croeserw is presented as an alternative to a new build 3-16 school on the Cymer Afan Comprehensive school site. It, too, seeks to deliver a 21st century facility in the upper Afan Valley for secondary and primary age pupils, removing the backlog maintenance, repair costs and surplus places associated with the existing sites and any requirement to travel outside the valley for English-medium secondary education.

In order to evaluate this proposal a new secondary school built to 21st Century Schools Programme construction and space standards has been assessed and costed. Such a build would provide the necessary classrooms, specialist rooms and accompanying indoor and outdoor facilities and associated spaces expected of a new build 3 -16 school.

The assessment has been based on a school for approx. 700 pupils aged 3-16 to be built on the existing Croeserw Primary school site.

A new school of 700 pupils (250 aged 11- 16 & 450 aged 3-11) requires a site area of approx. 34,630m². Additionally, approx. 6290m² of accommodation would be required.

Croeserw Primary school site is approx. 28,900m². As such, the site is insufficient in size to accommodate a new build 3-16 school. An adjacent ATP and a nearby playing field are possibly available for school use subject to negotiations and agreements but these have not been included as the space available would still be undersize.

The build only costs associated with this proposal (accommodation and external areas) are estimated at c.£18.7m. However, this estimate does not include additional costs resulting from the demolition of the existing buildings at Croeserw Primary school, a category grade C building (and other sites as appropriate); asbestos removal; remedial work identified during site investigations; meeting modern space and access requirements for car

parking/bus bays; and the hire of temporary classrooms for approx. 150 pupils required during the build process. Also not included is an assessment of the travel costs and traffic impact associated with transporting extra primary age pupils, 4/5 coaches daily which could be in addition to transport for secondary age pupils from the upper Afan Valley. These works and costs have not been assessed at this stage because approval to progress this scheme would be needed to justify the fees that would be incurred.

If delivered, this proposal would benefit from economies of scale with fewer sites to manage and maintain. However, a proposal in this form would also undermine the £5.2m investment in the new build primary school at Blaengwynfi, Pen Afan Primary.

This proposal does not address the inequity in per pupil funding resulting from the relatively small number of secondary pupils on roll - a year on year recurring revenue cost, nor the teaching and learning challenges presented by a small secondary school.

The 2018/19 Budget Share for Cymer Afan Comprehensive school would be £1,547,00, equating to £6,822 per pupil funding, compared to the secondary sector average of £4,245.

The 2018/19 Budget Share for a similar size Primary school would be £1,382,00 equating to £3,162 per pupil funding, compared to the primary sector average of £3,625. This compares with the combined per pupil funding for the four existing primary schools of £4,128.

There are some potential redundancy costs associated with this option.

Delivery of this proposal would rely on capital funding for which business case approval would be needed in order to access Welsh Government 21st Century Schools Programme grant funding.

A separate proposal suggested building a new 3-16 school to replace Cymer Afan Comprehensive and the partner primary schools of Croeserw, Cymer Afan and Glyncorwg. This would retain the new Pen Afan Primary school and reduce the site size and build costs. The effect at Croeserw would be to reduce the accommodation required to 5683m² and build costs to c.£17m.

Whereas this would support the investment at Blaengwynfi, it would result in additional costs incurred in managing and maintaining two schools on separate sites.

Option I: a new 3-16 English-medium school to replace Cymer Afan Comp., built alongside any partner primary school on their respective sites

This proposal would deliver a 21st century facility in the upper Afan Valley for secondary age pupils, removing any requirement to travel outside the valley for English-medium secondary education. It would also remove the backlog maintenance and repair costs associated with the existing sites as well as addressing surplus places.

In order to evaluate this proposal a new secondary school built to 21st Century Schools Programme construction and space standards has been assessed and costed. Such a build would provide the necessary classrooms, specialist rooms and accompanying indoor and outdoor facilities and associated spaces expected at a new build secondary school.

The assessment has been based on a school for approx. 250 pupils⁴⁰ aged 11-16, to be built on any partner primary school site alongside the existing primary school; namely, Cymer Afan Primary, Croeserw Primary, Glyncorwg Primary or Pen Afan Primary. This scheme would deliver a mix of new build and existing premises.

A new school of 250 pupils requires an external area of approx. 27,230m² together with 3925m² of accommodation.

The site areas for the respective schools are: Cymer Afan Primary - 17,300m²; Croeserw Primary - 28,900m², Glyncorwg Primary – 4241m² and Pen Afan Primary – 12,365m².

It is only Croeserw Primary school site that could be considered to be of a size capable of accommodating a 250 place secondary school. The current site, is insufficient in size to accommodate a 250 place secondary school together with the existing Croeserw Primary school and would rely on access to offsite

⁴⁰ Assumes an element of projected growth – table 4, consultation document

provision such as a playing field, ATP or the purchase of additional land. A primary school of 163 pupils requires an external area of approx. 3956m² and accommodation of approx. 1074m² when combined with a secondary school build.

Similarly, the next largest site, Cymer Afan Primary school at 17,300m², is also insufficient in size to accommodate a 250 place secondary school and this is the case even where land in the Council's ownership and adjacent to the school is included, the combined site area being 23,482m².

The build only costs associated with a new secondary school of 250 pupils (accommodation & external areas) are estimated at c.£9.7m. However, this estimate does not include additional costs resulting from any demolition or remodelling of the existing buildings; asbestos removal; remedial work identified during site investigations; meeting modern space and access requirements for car parking/bus bays; and the hire of temporary classrooms which may be required during the build process. Also not included is an assessment of the traffic impact associated with transporting secondary age pupils daily to the respective primary school sites. These works and costs have not been assessed at this stage because approval to progress this scheme would be needed to justify the fees that would be incurred.

This proposal would benefit from economies of scale from having the secondary and a primary school on one site. However, this proposal does not address the inequity in per pupil funding at secondary level resulting from the relatively small number of secondary pupils on roll - a year on year recurring revenue cost, nor the teaching and learning challenges presented by a small secondary school.

The 2018/19 Budget Share for a similar size secondary school would be approx. £1,547k equating to £6,822 per pupil funding, which is approx. 62% higher than the average for secondary schools in the County Borough which was £4,245

There are some potential redundancy costs associated with this option.

Delivery of this proposal would rely on capital funding for which business case approval would be needed in order to access Welsh Government 21st Century Schools Programme grant funding.

Option J: relocate Cymer Afan Comprehensive school to a different building or buildings within the community

This proposal would not deliver a 21st century facility in the upper Afan Valley for secondary age pupils. It would remove any requirement to travel outside the valley for English-medium secondary education. It would also remove the backlog maintenance and repair costs associated with the existing Cymer Afan Comprehensive school site as well as addressing surplus places and potential redundancy costs.

A school of 250 pupils requires an external area of approx. 27,230m². Additionally, approx. 3,925m² of accommodation would be required consisting of facilities appropriate for secondary education.

Relocating the secondary school pupils to a different building or buildings in the upper Afan Valley is likely to involve extensive work to ensure even basic facilities are fit for purpose and meet statutory requirements for educating 11-16 year olds. These include dining areas, circulation spaces, hall/gym space, toilet facilities and sufficient outdoor spaces for recreation and curriculum delivery. Specialist equipment needed for subjects such as science and technology would need to be moved and relocated to the identified building(s), a process which is expensive and often difficult to achieve. Importantly, safeguarding arrangements, including health and safety regulations, would need to be fully met, which again may be expensive and difficult to achieve depending on the building(s) identified. These arrangements may also have implications on current users.

The costs associated with this proposal have not been assessed as no suitable potential site(s) has been identified other than the school sites already assessed in this report. Approval to progress this scheme would be needed to justify the fees that would be incurred in undertaking feasibility assessments.

The year-on-year high costs of educating a relatively small number of secondary aged pupils is not lessened by this option and may even be increased depending on the location of the building and the management arrangements.

Option K: create a school for KS2 (ages 7 - 11) and KS3 (ages 11 – 14) from the upper Afan Valley

This proposal would impact on all pupils in the upper Afan Valley. Whereas, under this proposal, Foundation Phase pupils would remain in their current schools where the focus would be on delivering the Foundation Phase curriculum alone, junior school aged children from across the communities of the upper Afan Valley would transfer to the KS2/KS3 provision, wherever that was located. Under this proposal, they would remain there until aged 14 years when they would transfer to a secondary school outside the upper Afan Valley for KS4 (year 10 & year 11) education.

Recent changes to the curriculum in Wales have encouraged a more cohesive approach to teaching and learning across years 6 and 7 and this proposal could facilitate this approach. There could be advantages for more able year 6 pupils who could access the KS3 curriculum at an earlier stage. For others, however, this option could prove less attractive.

Transferring to another secondary school at 14 years of age (that is, at the end of year 9) could be considered to be more problematic than the traditional transfer at the end of year 6 (age 11 years) when children from other primary schools will be joining the secondary school together, giving them the chance to establish friendship groups and settle into a new school at the same time as their peers. Moving a year group of approx. 50 upper Afan Valley pupils at year 10 **every** year could cause difficulties – for the pupils who will have to make new friends and settle into an already established year group at an unfamiliar school, and for the staff continually having to get to know new pupils every year at a time when they will need to focus students on preparing for external examinations. (The current proposal would mean that a move in year 10 would happen only once in 2019 for one group of pupils). Over 70 pupils in years 9 & 10 have moved school in this academic school year in Neath Port Talbot but this was be across the whole of the secondary school estate, rather than all in one school. It would be the case however that older pupils should be less likely to have difficulty travelling to another school.

The impact on the respective primary schools will also be significant. With KS2 pupils from all of the primary schools moving to a site with secondary

pupils, the remaining infant pupils will effectively be taught in 4 separate 'infant' schools, which this Council has moved away from in favour of the benefits of primary phase (3-11 years) education. Transferring from a very small infant school at age 7 to a larger school environment on a different site involving a bus journey could, potentially, be a traumatic experience for some young children. Transition between infant and junior phases (Foundation Phase and KS2) would need very careful planning. With only Foundation Phase pupils on each primary site, the buildings will be more than 50% empty, potentially making running costs unaffordable.

Another suggestion has proposed the same model as above but accompanied by the rationalisation and reduction of the primary school sites with the remaining site(s) providing Foundation Phase teaching and learning only. This would potentially ease the excess surplus places but would still result in transition difficulties.

The site areas for the respective schools are: Cymer Afan Comp – 30,800m² (inc. grass field, ATP & Sports Hall); Cymer Afan Primary - 17,300m² (inc. adjacent land - 23,482m²); Croeserw Primary - 28,900m², Glyncorrwg Primary – 4241m² and Pen Afan Primary – 12,365m².

Extensive remodelling or new build would be required to accommodate either junior pupils on the secondary school site or secondary school pupils on a primary school site which is far more complex than the addition to a primary school site of a few portakabins or temporary classrooms, as suggested in one response. Whichever site was chosen, based on current pupil numbers it would be necessary to provide for approx. 220 junior age pupils and approx.150 secondary age pupils, a total of 370. Such an arrangement would require an external area of approx. 25,590m² and accommodation of approx. 4,741m². A school for 150 secondary age pupils alone would require a site area of 21,130m² and accommodation of 3,411m². It is only Croeserw Primary school and Cymer Afan Primary school that might be able to accommodate a KS2/KS3 provision, although the sites are short of the area required.

This proposal would not benefit from economies of scale as there will be no fewer sites to manage and maintain. It would, though, ensure that some secondary education is retained in the upper Afan Valley.

Delivery of the proposal would rely on capital funding for which business case approval would be needed in order to access Welsh Government 21st Century Schools Programme grant funding.

This proposal does not address the inequity in per pupil funding resulting from the relatively small number of secondary pupils on roll - a year on year recurring revenue cost, although the overall impact would be less with fewer secondary school pupil being funded at the higher level.

The 2018/19 Budget Share for the secondary school can be assumed to be at least £1,023,000, equating to £6,822 per pupil funding, compared to the secondary sector average of £4,245.

The 2018/19 Budget Share for a similar size primary school would be £770,000 equating to £3,419 per pupil funding, compared to the primary sector average of £3,625.

Additionally funding would be needed for Foundation Phase provision (200+ pupils) as it is not included in the figures above, and which could be significant.

There are some potential redundancy costs associated with this option.

Option L: to continue to deliver a 3-16 years education locally in the upper Afan Valley as a federation and to have a collaborative working arrangement in place with Maesteg and/or Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School to deliver a wider curriculum

This proposal would not deliver a 21st century facility in the upper Afan Valley for secondary or primary age pupils. It would, however, remove any requirement to travel outside the valley for English-medium secondary education.

This proposal would potentially benefit from having the support of a secondary school working collaboratively with the federation. Nevertheless, a proposal in this form would not address repair and maintenance costs at Cymer Afan

Comprehensive school nor the surplus places across the schools in the upper Afan Valley unless there was significant capital investment in the primary schools to remove unwanted accommodation for which capital investment would be needed, investment that would rely on business case approval by the Welsh Government in order to access 21st Century Schools Programme grant funding.

This proposal does not address the inequity in per pupil funding resulting from the relatively small number of secondary pupils on roll - a year on year recurring revenue cost that will continue under this proposal. Although the proposal seeks to address the teaching and learning challenges presented by a small secondary school, the delivery of a wider curriculum offer by another secondary school would be an additional cost burden, either directly on that school or that school's local authority. It is unlikely to prove attractive to those schools that are potentially in a position to offer a collaborative working arrangement as room exists for pupils to transfer to Maesteg Comprehensive and Ysgol Cwm Brombil where, in both cases, pupils would be able to access and benefit from new build facilities. This will also be the case at Cefn Saeson should the application for 21st Century Schools programme money become available to build a new school at Cimla, Neath.

Importantly, Bridgend County Borough Council is local authority with responsibility for Maesteg Comprehensive. Decisions about its involvement in a collaborative working arrangement rest with that Council - not with Neath Port Talbot.

Option M: a community Hub provision - community facilities and services at the respective school sites

The evidence from the options assessed shows that the existing site areas of upper Afan Valley schools are insufficient in size to accommodate the requirements of most of the proposed school configurations. This situation has a direct impact on any plans to create a hub of services, particularly where additional accommodation onsite is sought. The accommodation and external area assessments have been based on building bulleting specifications which set out the basic accommodation requirements for a school. Whereas community use of school premises through the hire of facilities is encouraged and promoted, this has to be an additional usage and

secondary to the needs of the school, as the principal users. Accommodating community services located offsite in buildings adjacent to the school is beyond the scope of this consultation report's option assessment process. Discussions have been held with NPTC Group regarding 14 -16 education. Whereas it is possible to deliver the junior apprenticeship programme from a number of different locations, including the upper Afan Valley, there is no obvious substantive benefit to any host school in this approach. Discussions have also been held with the Community Library and with Pen Y Cymoedd Wind Farm regarding access to the Wind Farm's Community Fund. Potential developments involving other services providers, including the private and voluntary sectors, require a longer planning and preparation cycle than allowed for in this consultation. Given the constraints identified in the alternative options considered, a hub based on a primary school only model presents greater opportunity in relation to meeting space and traffic requirements, and cost effectiveness and efficiency.

17. The next step

Following the publication of this consultation report, should the Council decide to progress with its plans as consulted upon then the next stage will be for it to approve the publication of a proposal, allowing 28 days for objections.

Consultees are advised that, unfavourable comments made during the consultation period will not be treated as objections. Anyone wishing to object will need to do so in writing during the statutory objection period. Comments submitted as part of this consultation process will need to be re-submitted in writing during the statutory objection period if they are to be considered as objections.

Appendices

Appendix A

Consultees

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cymer Afan Comprehensive School, together with the other federated schools of the upper Afan Valley | Pupils Parents Federated school staff Federated governing body School community groups/users Local community |
| Other schools | NPT schools (incl. the temporary Governing Body of Ysgol Cwm Brombil) Maesteg School |
| Trade Unions | Regional Organisers |
| Secondary Head Teachers' Group Primary Head Teachers' Group | NAASH LLAN |
| NPT Schools Forum | |
| NPT Elected Members | All |
| Town/Community Council | Pelenna |
| AM for Aberafan AM for Neath | David Rees Jeremy Miles |
| Regional AMs (South Wales West) | Suzy Davies Bethan Jenkins Caroline Jones Dai Lloyd |
| MP for Aberafan MP for Neath | Stephen Kinnock Christina Rees |
| Bordering Authorities | Swansea Bridgend Carmarthenshire Powys Rhondda Cynon Taf |

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Faith school education authorities | The Diocese of Menevia The Diocese of Llandaff |
| Regional Education Consortium | ERW |
| Estyn | |
| Children & Young Person Partnership (incl. Early Years Development and Childcare Communities First Partnership) | |
| NPTC Group | |
| Neath Port Talbot 14-19 Network | |
| SEN Partners | Action for Children Child & Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Consultant Community Paediatrician The Children's Centre NPT Hospital (Physiotherapy) |
| NPTCBC Integrated Transport Unit | |
| Police & Crime Commissioner | Alun Michael |
| WG Schools Management Division | |

**Consultation on the future of secondary education
in the upper Afan Valley**

Officer notes of the meeting with staff held at 3.45 p.m. on Wednesday, 17th
January 2018 at Cymer Afan Comprehensive School

Present: Aled Evans (AE), *Director of Education, ELLLS*
Andrew Thomas (AT), *Head of Transformation, ELLLS*
Rhiannon Crowhurst (RC), *Strategic School Improvement
Programme, ELLLS*
Richard Gordon (RG), *Strategic School Improvement
Programme, ELLLS*
Amy Hutchings (AH), *Human Resource Officer, CHEX*
Maureen Treharne (MT), *Human Resource Officer, CHEX*

Mairwen Goodridge (MG), *Chair of Governors (Federation of
schools of the upper Afan Valley)*
Cedric Burden (CB), *Head Teacher (Temporary)*

Teaching and support staff of the five schools of the Federation
of schools of the upper Afan Valley

Union Representatives

Welcome introduction:

1. CB welcomed staff and officers to the school

The proposal:

2. AE introduced the officers and outlined the purpose of the consultation meeting, emphasising that this is an opportunity to comment on the proposal and to seek clarification on points of detail. He stated that the consultation will be meaningful and informed, and he acknowledged that the proposal will inevitably be a cause of anxiety to staff given the uncertainty over job security.

3. AE explained the proposal being consulted upon and noted that he expects to receive counter proposals as part of the consultation process.
4. AT urged staff to read and submit their comments on the proposal, either as individuals or collectively. Staff comments will help officers test the soundness of the proposal. An assurance was given that alternative proposals would be given proper consideration.
5. AT explained that, subject to the outcome of consultation, it is likely that a report on the proposal will be considered by Members during March. However, a date for the report is not fixed to allow for detailed consideration of alternative options.
6. AT outlined the Council's Strategic School Improvement Programme and the reasoning behind the current proposal for Cymer Afan Comprehensive School.

Comments/queries & responses

7. **Staff comment/query:** the rationale for constructing Ysgol Cwm Brombil with sufficient pupil places to accommodate pupils from the upper Afan Valley was queried.

Officer response: Planning school places is not an exact science and forecasting is an estimation based on available information. An analysis of pupils living in the catchment area of the new school who could claim a place there together with projected growth suggested that the school needs to be larger than the pupil roll the existing primary and secondary schools. There are also efficiencies to be gained in building large schools and experience has shown that new build schools attract additional pupils.

8. **Staff comment/query:** If (the above) is the case what happens if those places are claimed as anticipated?

Officer response: the admission arrangements give priority to catchment area pupils and the upper Afan Valley would be part of Ysgol Cwm Brombil's designated catchment area.

9. **Staff comment/query:** unlike the transfer of pupils to Ysgol Bae Baglan when all three secondary school closed at the same time, the pupils of the upper Afan Valley will be disadvantaged as they will transfer to the new school one year later than the Dyffryn School pupils. This suggests poor planning and preparation.

Officer response: should the proposal be implemented then arrangements will need to be put in place between the schools to successfully manage the transition. A September 2019 start date allows time for this to be planned. Ideally, the consultation over the proposal for the upper Afan Valley and the development of Ysgol Cwm Brombil would have been concurrent. Notwithstanding the excellent work being undertaken by staff in maintaining standards, this proposal presents an opportunity for pupils from the upper Afan Valley to experience and benefit from a 21st century school environment.

10. **Staff comment/query:** concerns were raised over the proposal's impact on employment in the upper Afan Valley, the proposal does not accord with the five cross cutting themes in the Council's Single Integrated Plan:

- *Children and Young People in Neath Port Talbot are physically and emotionally healthy; Adults of working age in Neath Port Talbot physically and emotionally healthy; and Older People in Neath Port Talbot are independent and enjoy a good quality of life;*
- *People in Neath Port Talbot "feel safe and are safe";*
- *Neath Port Talbot's communities and environment are sustainable;*
- *Neath Port Talbot has a strong and prosperous economy leading to reduced poverty;*
- *People in Neath Port Talbot fulfil their learning potential.*

11. **Staff comment/query:** the school is the main employer in the area and closing the school will result in job losses. Added to which, public transport services are being cut and the travel time journey for pupils will be at least 8 hrs per week.

Officer response: the proposed travel time is not unusual across Wales and there are schools within NPT for which pupils have similar travel times. The Council will be working hard to protect jobs and has a good track record on redeployment.

12. **Staff comment/query:** carlessness in the upper Afan Valley is a barrier to pupils from the upper Afan Valley taking part in extra-curricular activities at Ysgol Cwm Brombil.

Officer response: schools manage extra-curricular activities in a variety of ways, not all such activities take place after school, some take place during the school day. Schools within NPT whose pupils receive school transport manage to engage their pupils in after school activities and ensure their safe return home afterwards.

13. **Staff comment/query:** lack of social mobility and employment opportunities are significant issues in the upper Afan Valley and investment is need to maintain the communities. Estate agents have reported that house prices have dropped since the proposal was announced. Implementing the proposal will exacerbate the issues of poverty and affect the viability of the communities.

14. **Staff comment/query:** the proposed closure of the school will undermine the good work that's ongoing to bring about improvements in a deprived area. The school provides a nurturing role that is invaluable to an area like the upper Afan Valley and investment is needed to develop lifelong learning provision.

15. **Staff comment/query:** academic research has shown that lengthy travel times to school are detrimental to pupil's well-being and increases the likelihood of mental health issues developing.

Officer response: request that the research cited is shared with officers of the Council, consideration of which will be part of the response to consultation. Emotional well-being is an area of which the Council is sensitive. As part of the consultation process, the views of pupils are being sought.

16. **Staff comment/query:** concern was raised at the management of children who take ill at school given the distance between home and Ysgol Cwm Brombil, the difficulty presented by public transport and carelessness in the upper Afan Valley.

Officer response: flashpoints during the school day have to be managed and schools in similar positions currently manage those situations.

17. **Staff comment/query:** difficulties relating to transport are a prime concern. That concern does not exist whilst Cymer Afan Comprehensive school remains open.

18. **Staff comment/query:** it is possible that pupils could be dispersed across three schools which would be disruptive to peer group relationships and community cohesion.

Officer response: parents have the right to seek admission of their child to a school of their choice and are free to exercise that choice. The Council is required to provide assistance with home to school transport to the nearest suitable school. Under the proposal the Council will also provide assistance with transport to Ysgol Cwm Brombil although this is not the nearest suitable school. Assistance with transport will not necessarily be provided to Cefn Saeson Comprehensive school.

19. **Staff comment/query:** it is possible that pupils could transfer from the upper Afan Valley primary schools to one of three secondary schools which would cause confusion and make transition arrangements operationally very difficult to manage compared to the current procedures within the federation which are extremely effective.

Officer response: the Council would wish all pupils to transfer to Ysgol Cwm Brombil, this would support effective transition as the primary schools in the upper Afan Valley would be partners with the new school. If parents chose otherwise the situation would have to be managed as it is in many other schools within NPT.

20. **Staff comment/query:** this proposal is a cost cutting exercise

Officer response: all efficiency savings and capital receipts resulting from the proposal will be retained within the education budget for the benefit of pupils within NPT.

21. **Staff comment/query:** the proposed Northern Powerhouse Developments adventure resort proposal presents a unique opportunity to promote the upper Afan Valley and attract investment and inward migration both of which will be lost if there is no secondary school locally available. The proposed leisure development should be explored as a source of funding for the building of a new school. This development would also increase social mobility within the area

Officer response: an update on the Northern Powerhouse Developments' project will be sought and its impact on the proposal considered.

22. **Staff comment/query:** concern expressed about the future of primary education in the upper Afan Valley and the future of the federation.

Officer response: there are no plans currently to remove primary education from the upper Afan Valley and the proposal does not decrease the benefits to the primary schools of remaining within a federation.

23. **Staff comment/query:** Given that money has been secured for a new build at Cefn Saeson Comprehensive school, a better plan would be to consult on the closure of Cymer Afan Comprehensive school within that new build proposal. This would mean that all pupils would be starting at the same time and not disadvantaged by staggered start arrangements.

Officer response: this comment is noted for consideration but it would still result in the closure of Cymer Afan Comprehensive school.

24. **Staff comment/query:** currently there are excellent transition arrangements between Cymer Afan Comprehensive and the partner primary schools. This would be lost under this proposal.

Officer response: excellent transition arrangements exist within other schools which have developed similar enlightened and innovative examples of support for pupil transition.

25. **Staff comment/query:** there are high levels of additional learning needs amongst pupils in the upper Afan Valley which need the support of the nurturing environment provided by Cymer Afan Comprehensive school.

Officer response: the level of needs within the upper Afan valley is no greater than in other areas found within NPT.

26. **Staff comment/query:** will jobs at Ysgol Cwm Brombil be ring fenced for staff at Cymer Afan Comprehensive should the school close?

Officer response: the employment of staff at Ysgol Cwm Brombil is the responsibility of that school's governing body. The Council has developed agreement whereby schools in NPT can sign an employers' pledge whereby staff at risk of redundancy will be given consideration for vacant posts.

27. **Union representative comment:** The Council has a good track record of working with unions and employees to secure the redeployment of staff. The unions are working with the Council in negotiating schemes for voluntary redundancy.

Officer response: where staff wish to continue in employment the Council will work hard to facilitate this. Similarly, where staff wish to explore other employment opportunities, the Council will seek to support staff where possible.

28. **Union representative comment:** this proposal will detrimentally impact of the Council's ability to deliver on its responsibilities under the Future Generations Act.

Officer response: the proposal will deliver a sustainable education provision for pupils. The community impact assessment identifies the

arrangements that can be made to mitigate any impact the proposal has on community provision.

29. **Union representative comment:** concern that the past record will give no reassurance on this occasion as very few jobs will become available at Ysgol Cwm Brombil; most will have been allocated prior to its opening. This will be especially the case with responsibility post holders. It would have been better if both proposals could have been developed concurrently. Linking the proposal to the new build plans for Cefn Saeson Comprehensive schools would provide greater opportunity for staff redeployment.

Officer response: as a consequence of the proposal, increased pupil numbers attending Ysgol Cwm Brombil should result in additional staff being required. The number of posts will depend in part on the number of pupils transferring to the new school. The Council will be actively encouraging the governing body of Ysgol Cwm Brombil to implement the employers' pledge. It is also the case that experience of previous school reorganisation has shown that some staff take the opportunity to pursue other careers and interests. Staff in the federation of schools in the upper Afan Valley are highly regarded which will assist with redeployment prospects. The Council provides 3 year pay protection for teaching staff and 12 mths for support staff.

30. **Staff comment/query:** An apology should be given to the staff for not informing them of the proposal. They first heard of the plans via social media.

Officer comment: the process being followed is determined by the Council's committee processes and the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code both of which are being adhered to.

31. **Staff comment/query:** the preferred option of the federation is to maintain the secondary school and the four primary schools in the upper Afan Valley and, to achieve that outcome, staff wish to work with the Council to develop a viable alternative to the current proposal.

Officer comment: alternative options brought forward a result of consultation will be fully explored.

**Consultation on the future of secondary education
in the upper Afan Valley**

Officer notes of the meeting with federated governing body held at 5.30 p.m.
on Wednesday, 17th January 2018 at Cymer Afan Comprehensive School

Present: Aled Evans (AE), *Director of Education, ELLLS*
Andrew Thomas (AT), *Head of Transformation, ELLLS*
Rhiannon Crowhurst (RC), *Strategic School Improvement
Programme, ELLLS*
Richard Gordon (RG), *Strategic School Improvement
Programme, ELLLS*
Amy Hutchings (AH), *Human Resource Officer, CHEX*
Maureen Treharne (MT), *Human Resource Officer, CHEX*

Mairwen Goodridge (MG), *Chair of Governors (Federation of
schools of the upper Afan Valley)*
Governors (Federation of schools of the upper Afan Valley)

Cedric Burden (CB), *Head Teacher (Temporary)*

Welcome introduction:

2. MG welcomed governors and officers to the school

The proposal:

3. AE introduced the officers and outlined the purpose of the consultation meeting, emphasising that this is an opportunity to comment on the proposal and to seek clarification on points of detail. He acknowledged that the proposal will inevitably be a cause of anxiety to staff given the uncertainty over job security.
4. AE explained the proposal being consulted upon and mentioned that Cymer Afan Comprehensive school is a small school in terms of pupils numbers and pupils in the upper Afan Valley have an opportunity to

receive their education in a 21st Century school environment at Ysgol Cwm Brombil.

5. AT explained the consultation process and stated that the consultation will be meaningful and the process is an opportunity to shape the proposal. He gave an undertaking to explore alternative proposals submitted as part of the consultation. The timetable for the process was outlined although this would be shaped by the responses received. The role of elected Members in the decision making process was explained and the importance of submitting their comments was emphasised.
6. AT outlined the Council's Strategic School Improvement Programme and the reasoning behind the current proposal for Cymer Afan Comprehensive School and commented that the proposed implementation date of September 2019 aids planning for change. He stated that the focus was on providing the best educational opportunities for young people.
7. MG stated that the governors and staff have the right view on the matter of what's best for the young people and that officers have got it wrong.
8. AT suggested that the federation of primary schools should continue.

Comments/queries & responses

9. **Governor comment/query:** the consultation document should be on the Council's consultation portal and not on the SSIP webpage.

Officer response: the consultation is localised with a defined audience which has been targeted with the relevant information. Using the search facility on the Council's website with key words such as 'consultation', 'Cymer', 'Afan', will link the search to the consultation document and supporting documentation. The consultation follows the procedures required by the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code which, by way of information, does not require that face-to-face meetings are held.

10. **Governor comment/query:** the consultation document contains jargon and a great deal of complicated detail that makes the document difficult for some stakeholders to access.

Officer response: the content of the consultation document is determined in part by the requirements of the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code. As a consultation document it also needs to meet the information requirements of a wide range of stakeholders. In preparing the document, the unnecessary use of technical terms has been considered and, where identified, jargon has been removed. A simplified version for pupils has been prepared.

11. **Governor comment/query:** the upper Afan Valley school community needed convincing that federation was the way forward in order to retain education in the area. The proposal to close the secondary school compromises the position of those governors who persuaded the community to adopt the federation model.
12. **Governor comment/query:** concern that schools within the federation are considering leaving the federation and reverting to separate school status.

Officer response: the federation offers economies and financial savings that allow the upper Afan Valley schools to remain viable. Relying on individual budget shares will make it extremely difficult for some of the upper Afan Valley schools to continue to operate. Even without a secondary school, there are benefits to maintaining a federated arrangement for the primary schools.

13. **Governor comment/query:** concern was expressed at the arrangements for informing staff of the proposal who first heard of the plans via social media. An apology to staff was requested as this has caused staff unnecessary stress.

Officer comment: the process being followed is determined by the Council's committee processes and the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code both of which are being adhered to.

14. **Governor comment/query:** the pupils will not attend Ysgol Cwm Brombil; the Council has misunderstood the view of the people who are proud to be part of the upper Afan Valley community. Some parents have indicated that should this proposal proceed they will remove their children from

secondary education and make arrangements for them to be home educated. This proposal does not improve the well-being of pupils but increases anxiety and stress levels particularly with the lengthy daily journey times.

15. **Governor comment/query:** parent governor comments that parents do not wish for their children to be travelling on a bus for 45 mins.

Officer response: it is noted that there are contradictory 'trial-run' journey times for home to school travel and these will be examined further in order to inform the consultation process. Ensuring arrangements support pupil well-being is a concern of officers too.

16. **Governor comment/query:** the start time of Ysgol Cwm Brombil will affect the length of day for pupils with a long journey to and from the school. They will be leaving home and returning in the dark.

Officer response: the start and finish times of Ysgol Cwm Brombil have yet to be determined by the school governors.

17. **Governor comment/query:** transition between primary and secondary education is excellent and this proposal undermines that process.

Officer response: excellent transition arrangements exist within other schools which have developed similar enlightened and innovative examples of support for pupil transition.

18. **Governor comment/query:** concern was expressed that, although 21st century facilities will be available at Ysgol Cwm Brombil, pupils from the upper Afan Valley will not necessarily be able to access these because travel time and distance would impact on the ability to participate in extra-curricular activities. There was also a concern that class sizes would increase compared to those at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school.

Officer response: Ysgol Cwm Brombil will be funded for the number of pupils on roll in line with other schools of its size. These schools successfully deliver the curriculum and provide a full range of educational

opportunities to pupils, including ensuring access to extra-curricular activities.

19. **Governor comment/query:** a more acceptable option would be to build a new school in the upper Afan Valley as this would attract more people to the area, including more children and young people. The clean air and countryside of the upper Afan Valley are attributes the Council should be exploiting and a new school would be seen as a commitment the future of the upper Afan Valley communities.

20. **Governor comment/query:** in order to maintain education in the upper Afan Valley and achieve the pupil numbers required by the Council, a preferred option would be to provide education at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school for pupils who would otherwise receive their education at Cefn Saeson Comprehensive school.

21. **Governor comment/query:** the preferred choice for the upper Afan Valley would be the status quo position. A new build 3-16 school on one site would be the next preferred option.

Officer response: full consideration will be given to alternative proposals, including a costed 3-16 option. The Northern Powerhouse Developments proposal for the area will also be given due consideration.

22. **Governor comment/query:** clarification was sought over home to school transport entitlements.

Officer response: assistance with home to school travel would be available to eligible pupils attending Maesteg Comp. school as it is the nearest suitable school to the upper Afan Valley. Assistance with home to school travel will also be provided to eligible pupils attending Ysgol Cwm Brombil as it the Council's designated receiving school. Assistance with home to school travel will not be available to Cefn Saeson Comp. school unless Maesteg Comp. school is full and has no capacity to admit pupils from the upper Afan Valley.

23. **Governor comment/query:** there are high levels of additional learning needs and free school meal take-up at Cymer Comprehensive school.

The small school, nurturing environment provides the support that these pupils need and which they would not get elsewhere.

Officer response: high levels of additional learning needs and free school meal take-up are not unique to the upper Afan Valley. There are other areas of the county borough with higher levels of need than is currently the case at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school.

24. **Governor comment/query:** concern that withdrawal of public transport to the villages of Glynorrwg and Abercregan will mean that pupils will not be able to access extra-curricular activities at Ysgol Cwm Brombil.

Officer response: the withdrawal of public transport services will impact on Cymer Afan Comp. as the transport difficulties are between Cymmer and Glynorrwg and Abercregan. Services between Port Talbot and Cymmer are not affected. It is noted that the school's minibus is used to transport pupils to their homes following participation in after school activities. Similarly, it would be expected that the leadership of Ysgol Cwm Brombil will make suitable arrangements to support access to after school activities.

25. **Governor comment/query:** the timing of the proposal means that Ysgol Cwm Brombil will be open and its governance arrangements established before Cymer Afan Comp. school closes. As such the upper Afan Valley will not have a voice on that school's governing body and the pupils transferring there from Cymer Afan Comp. school will not be represented.

Officer response: if the proposal is approved, representation of the upper Afan Valley on the governing body would need to be organised. The rules around governance will facilitate this.

26. **Governor comment/query:** the children of the valleys are different to other children, they are the heart of the community. If they have to leave the upper Afan Valley and the school closes they will lose their sense of belonging to the area and the upper Afan Valley will be a less attractive place to live. The Council needs to give its full support to the upper Afan Valley in order to realise its potential as a place for living and learning.

**Consultation on the future of secondary education
in the upper Afan Valley**

Officer notes of the meeting with the parents/carers held at 5.00 p.m. on
Thursday, 18th January 2018 at Cymer Afan Comprehensive School

Present: Aled Evans (AE), *Director of Education, ELLLS*
Andrew Thomas (AT), *Head of Transformation, ELLLS*
Rhiannon Crowhurst (RC), *Strategic School Improvement
Programme, ELLLS*
Richard Gordon (RG), *Strategic School Improvement
Programme, ELLLS*
Brendan Griffiths (BG), *Passenger Transport ENVR*

Cedric Burden (CB), *Head Teacher (Temporary)*

Parents of pupils attending schools within the federation
Pupils

Welcome introduction:

1. CB welcomed governors and officers to the school and announced emergency evacuation procedures.

The proposal:

2. AE introduced the officers and outlined the purpose of the consultation meeting, emphasising that this is an opportunity to comment on the proposal and to seek clarification on points of detail. He stated that the consultation will be meaningful and recognised that the proposal will inevitably be a cause of anxiety to parents and pupils. He acknowledged that parents may have already formed strong views on the proposal.
3. AE explained the proposal being consulted upon and noted that he expects to receive counter proposals as part of the consultation process. He stated that Cymer Afan Comprehensive is one of the

smallest secondary schools in Wales and the proposal offers the opportunity for pupils from the upper Afan Valley to experience a 21st century school environment at Ysgol Cwm Brombil.

4. AT urged parents to read the consultation document and to submit their comments on the proposal as these would be read by the Members of the Council and would help inform any decision they take.

5. **Comments/queries & responses**

6. **Parental comment/query:** the concept of a 21st century school facility being better than the existing provision at Cymer Afan Comp. school was challenged. It was held that Cymer Afan Comp. school provided 21st century education and was the best in the area.

Officer response: standards at Cymer Afan Comp. school were not the reason for bringing forward this proposal. Providing secondary education to a small number of pupils in an out dated facility was not ideal and there were better ways of supporting pupils to realise their aspirations and capabilities.

7. **Parental comment/query:** parents expressed cynicism about the consultation process believing their comments would not be reported or read by Members.

Officer response: the committee process within the Council is open to the public and is transparent in the way it is conducted. All responses to the consultation will be made available for Members to read and each point raised by consultees will be reported in a summary of responses. This will be available in a consultation report which will form part of the report to Members and will be available to the public.

8. **Parental comment/query:** it is believed that regardless of the consultation exercise the Council is going to close Cymer Afan Comp. school.

Officer response: the proposal is still at the consultation stage and no decision has yet been taken.

9. **Parental comment/query:** requested the amount being spent on Ysgol Cwm Brombil.

Officer response: the cost of Ysgol Cwm Brombil is estimated at £31m.

10. **Parental comment/query:** concern was expressed at the travel time and distance for young children, particularly those with anxiety issues. They would be too afraid and too small to manage the journey. They currently feel fully supported at Cymer Afan Comp. school.

Officer response: excellent support for pupil well-being is available at other NPT schools who are experienced at managing pupils with concerns and anxieties.

11. **Parental comment/query:** the amount of backlog maintenance at Cymer Afan Comp. school was challenged. It was held that the state of the building was the result of poor management and a lack of investment by the Council in dealing with the maintenance issues. Parents queried why some of the £31m set aside for Ysgol Cwm Brombil could not be spent on repairing Cymer Afan Comp. school.

Officer response: the Council has a limited budget for capital repairs which will not address the £100m backlog maintenance costs for schools within NPT. The money for Ysgol Cwm Brombil comes from a 21st century school fund which is specifically for new build and major refurbishment projects, not repair and maintenance. No longer are sufficient amounts of public money available for piecemeal repair and maintenance schemes.

12. **Parental comment/query:** parents are not opposed to change but queried why a new 21st century secondary school could not be built in the upper Afan Valley. Why are Cymer Afan Comp. school pupils expected to travel to Margam rather than build a 'super school' in the upper Afan Valley? To make the secondary pupil numbers more viable, an alternative option would be to transport Cefn Saeson Comp. school pupils to a new build school in the upper Afan Valley

13. **Parental comment/query:** how has the Council managed to secure funding for Cefn Saeson Comp. school when it argues it cannot for Cymer Afan Comp.?

Officer response: a proposal for a new build school will be fully considered and analysed but with so few secondary age pupils in the upper Afan Valley it is difficult to see how a sound business case could be developed to justify the expenditure needed. Nevertheless, this option will be properly analysed and alternative proposals explored. Ysgol Cwm Brombil is currently under construction and will be available from the autumn term 2018 to provide pupils with a 21st century school learning environment.

14. **Parental comment/query:** the Council should build a new 3-16 school in the upper Afan Valley given its policy on 'all-through' schools.

Officer response: the 3-16 model for new school builds is not suitable in all situations. The Council has used this model only where it is considered to be appropriate.

15. **Parental comment/query:** some pupils in Year 5 & Year 6 attend the POD at Cymer Afan Comp. school. This support service could not be provided at Ysgol Cwm Brombil.

Officer response: should the proposal be implemented then arrangements will need to be put in place to deliver the support required by primary age pupils.

16. **Parental comment/query:** the secondary school has been led by four head teachers in the past few years and this is not good for stability. Has this been a ploy of the Council to undermine the school? The upper Afan Valley needs a high number of teachers to support the learning and well-being needs of the pupils. This is why standards are so good.

Officer response: it is the case that there will be fewer teachers per pupil at Ysgol Cwm Brombil than is presently the case at Cymer Afan

Comp. school. This is because the schools in the federation including the secondary school are funded at a higher rate. The secondary school receives approx. £7000 per pupil. The average for the other secondary schools in NPT is approx. £4500 including schools serving areas with similar or even high levels of deprivation than the upper Afan Valley. The extra money is because the secondary school is a small school. The larger number of pupils at other schools mean that they are better placed to deliver teaching and learning at a lower cost. These schools would be able to deliver education to an even higher standard if the money was shared more equitably.

17. **Parental comment/query:** the Council is penalising Cymer Afan Comp. school for being a small school rather than celebrating the value it adds to pupils' learning and well-being together with the benefit it brings to the community.

18. **Parental comment/query:** children are the heart of the community. If they have to leave the upper Afan Valley for their education they will lose their sense of belonging to the area. This proposal does nothing to protect the heritage of the valley.

19. **Parental comment/query:** under this proposal, what time does the Council expect children to leave home to catch the bus to school? Children will be leaving for school in the dark and returning in the dark. They will have to travel for at least 10hrs each week and will be away from their home for longer periods than working adults. Added to which there is the concern of school buses breaking down and children being left stranded.

Officer response: the start and finish times of Ysgol Cwm Bromptil have yet to be determined but such travel arrangements are not unusual at other schools within the county borough. School buses, as with other forms of transport, occasionally break down but pupils should not be left stranded. Any such incidents will be fully investigated.

20. **Parental comment/query:** this proposal does not improve the well-being of pupils but increases anxiety and stress levels particularly with

the lengthy daily journey times. The children will not be able to handle the change of school and new arrangements.

Officer response: the well-being of pupils is a concern of the Council too and schools have experience in supporting pupils with anxieties and concerns.

21. **Parental comment/query:** difficulties were perceived in managing children who take ill at school. Parents without cars would not be able to readily travel to the school as the public bus service is neither direct nor frequent.

Officer response: pupil sickness during the school day has to be managed and schools are experienced at managing those situations.

22. **Parental comment/query:** will the proposal be the subject of an equality impact assessment.

Officer response: the proposal will be equality impact assessed at the appropriate stages of the process.

23. **Parental comment/query:** why is Ysgol Cwm Brombil being built oversize and why is it intended to admit pupils a year after it opens? The vertical curriculum at Cymer Afan Comp. school is different to others school and this will present a problem, as will ensuring pupils sitting external exams are not disadvantaged. Children's education will suffer, particularly those in the final year of school. This could be made worse if teachers leave the school before it closes.

Officer response: there are both advantages and disadvantages in transferring pupils to Ysgol Cwm Brombil a year after it opens. Starting a year later will give time for the school to carefully plan for the arrival of the new intake, including managing the different curriculum arrangements and ensuring those sitting GCSE examinations are fully supported. As for teachers leaving before September 2019, this is a situation that will need to be carefully monitored and managed.

24. **Parental comment/query:** children choosing to attend Maesteg Comp. rather than Ysgol Cwm Brombil will have to pay for transport. Parents in the upper Afan Valley will not send their children to Ysgol Cwm Brombil.

Officer response: parents can chose to send their child to whichever school they wish provided there is room. For children wishing to attend Maesteg Comp. there would be no charge for home to school travel for eligible pupils as it is the nearest suitable school to the upper Afan Valley. There would be no charge also for home to school travel for eligible pupils attending Ysgol Cwm Brombil as it is the Council's proposed receiving school. However, there will be a charge for home to school travel to Cefn Saeson Comp. school unless Maesteg Comp. school is full.

25. **Parental comment/query:** pupils travelling on the school bus to Ysgol Cwm Brombil would be unsafe as there would be no adult supervision. Can the council guarantee a child's safety and that children will not be bullied?

Officer response: it is not usual to provide adult supervision on school buses taking secondary age pupils to school. This is common practice across other schools where pupils travel to school by bus. However, the concern over the travel to school is noted by officers and will be fully considered as part of the consultation process.

26. **Parental comment/query:** problems with transport will mean that pupils may not arrive at school on time or even miss the whole day which will result in pupils and parents being penalised for late arrival or for not attending school.

Officer response: no pupil or parents will be penalised for not attending school as a result of problems with the Council's home to school transport arrangements. This will be made explicit in the response to consultation

27. **Parental comment/query:** has not the Council explored the opportunities for a new school build funded by the Northern Powerhouse proposal for the upper Afan Valley.

Officer response: the Council can use agreements with developers to support schemes that benefit the community, including funding schools and this will be investigated as part of the consultation process.

28. **Pupil comment/query:** there is concern about travelling to and from school as the upper Afan Valley is prone to icy roads and snow. Although the school has been closed only for a few days because of bad weather there is no mention in the consultation document about the times when the school has had to close early because of snow. Getting pupils back from Margam when the weather is bad is a real concern

Officer response: managing inclement weather is something that schools are experienced at doing.

29. **Pupil comment/query:** there is disappointment that staff were not directly informed of the proposal by the Council rather than hearing about it on social media. An apology to staff would be appropriate.

Officer response: the arrangements followed the procedural process required of the Council.

30. **Parental and pupil comment/query:** answers are not being given to the questions. Officers are responding to questions by saying everything will be considered as part of the consultation. Parents want answers.

Officer response: this is about consultation. No decision has been taken at this stage. Members will take that decision when all the necessary information, including views expressed at consultation, has been gathered.

**Consultation on the future of secondary education
in the upper Afan Valley**

Officer notes of meetings held with pupil representatives (Years 5 – 11) from the Federated Schools of the Upper Afan Valley on 26th January 2018.

Summary of comments and queries:

1. **Pupil comment/query:** We will have a travel time of up to two hours a day, meaning a 40 hour week for us, more than most adults - we will be too exhausted to do homework or outside school activities if we have to travel for those hours. If we have bad weather how will we get to school? Will our parents be fined if we aren't able to attend because buses are cancelled or if the bus is late? What will happen if we miss the bus – how will we get to school? What will happen if we are ill and need to go home? How will we be able to get home if we stay for after school activities? How will we be able to attend out of school activities which may start early – we won't be home in time? Will we be safe travelling on a bus? What about bullying?

Officer Response: A great number of pupils all across Neath Port Talbot travel on buses to get to school without difficulty and it is not expected that this proposal would be any different. The new school would be expected to make arrangements for pupils to be able to attend after school activities, as happens in other schools, and to ensure that all pupils have the chance to take part if they wish. If buses are cancelled because of bad weather, or if there is some other problem which prevents buses arriving on time then parents of pupils affected will not be penalised; it is very important to arrive in time to catch the bus as this is your/your parents responsibility – in the same way that it is your/your parents responsibility to make sure you attend school on time now. Should the situation arise where pupils are unwell during the day and need to go home it is expected that the new school will have a system in place for managing this as is the case in other schools in Neath Port Talbot currently. All checks will be taken to make sure that buses carrying pupils to school are safe and meet all regulations;

it is the responsibility of the school to ensure that bullying whether on a bus or in the school building or grounds, is dealt with according to the approved policies and practices – bullying is not acceptable in any situation.

2. **Pupil comment/query:** Cymer Afan Comprehensive is small school where all staff know pupils far better than they would in a larger school – how can it be better for us to go to a larger school? What will happen to our friendship groups – will we all be split up? We won't make such good progress in a larger school; staff won't have enough time for us.

Officer Response: There is some evidence to suggest that in schools with more pupils children often benefit from larger friendship groups and have greater opportunities to make a wider circle of friends with different life experiences. If the proposal progresses it will be very important to make sure that there is good communication between this school and the new Margam school so that staff know who your friends are and are able to make sure you are supported through the move. It will also be important for the new school to know all about you and to make sure they are doing everything possible to make sure you can make as much progress as you are now.

3. **Pupil comment/query:** How will the new school be able to help children who have difficulty learning? What help can they give to children who are anxious or who have ADHD or ASD? Some pupils have settled here because they get extra support – how will a bigger school be able to give them this, they will have too many pupils?

Officer Response: All schools have a duty to support children with additional learning needs and if the proposal goes ahead then this school and the new school will need to make sure that there is good communication between them so that all needs are understood. It is recognised that some children will find a change difficult and again they should have support to help them settle in. In other situations where schools have closed and there have been concerns that children will be unhappy or not have their needs met because of being a larger school, it has been found that children have settled well with the right help early in

the process and have gone on to be very happy and to make good progress.

4. **Pupil comment/query:** Why should we have to travel to a more polluted school in Margam? This is dangerous for our health.

Officer Response: The new school in Margam is being built on land where a comprehensive and primary school are already operating and there is no evidence to suggest that those children who attend are not healthy or are being affected by pollution.

5. **Pupil comment/query:** What will happen to the staff who work here, will they have jobs in the school in Margam? If they leave this school early (before it closes) our education will be disrupted – we could have no teachers?

Officer Response: If the proposal goes ahead and Cymer Afan Comprehensive closes then the staff who are employed to work here will no longer have a job. However the Council have a good track record in helping people in these circumstances to either find new jobs at another school, or to leave education and work elsewhere, or retire from work – depending on the circumstances of the individual members of staff and what they would prefer to do. If the proposal progresses then the staff will have the opportunity to further discuss all the options available to them with officers. It is also possible that some staff may leave before the school closes – if this happens they will be replaced by other teachers as happens now, and while experience and expertise may be lost in some cases it should not mean that pupils are left without teachers or support staff.

6. **Pupil comment/query:** What does 21st century education mean? We have a 21st Century education in Cymer Afan Comprehensive School now. Buildings don't make a good school, we already have the resources we need. What will happen to all the resources we have here if the school closes?

21st century school is the term used to describe a school built in the 21st century – such as Ysgol Bae Baglan or the new school in Margam. This

means the school will be as up to date as it can be in terms of the type of materials used in construction, the way it is designed for learning and socialising, and the types of resources provided. It doesn't mean that the education provided will be different to any other school but research has shown that schools that operate in new buildings with up to date resources and facilities can have a significant positive impact on teaching and learning, and on standards attained. If the proposal is approved and this school closes then reusable resources will be reallocated to other Neath Port Talbot Schools as appropriate.

7. **Pupil comment/query:** Why can't we have a new school build here? Why don't you close Cefn Saeson and move the children from there to this school?

Officer Response: A new build for this area either a secondary or all through 3-16 school is something we have been asked to look at in more detail by staff and Governors of the school and we have agreed to do so. It is unlikely that we would close Cefn Saeson and move pupils to Cymer Afan as this school doesn't have enough space to accommodate the number of pupils attending Cefn Saeson currently.

8. **Pupil comment/query:** Why have you built the new school at Margam too big? If extra pupils not already in the schools 'claim a place' will there still be room for us? What if there isn't room?

Officer Response: The new school has been built to accommodate the pupils who currently attend Groes Primary school and Dyffryn School, and to also make sure there is enough room for those children who live in the catchment area currently but who attend other schools. Experience has shown that a new build school often attracts children from the local area who were attending other schools and it is important to make sure there is enough space for them as they can claim a place. If all those extra pupils attend, and if this proposal is approved and all Cymmer Afan Comprehensive school pupils also wish to attend then the Council and the school Governing Body will make sure they can all be accommodated. We won't know for sure how many pupils will want a place until nearer the time of opening.

9. **Pupil comment/query:** What happens if we decide to go to Maesteg – they have no room there!

Officer Response: Maesteg School has been consulted as part of this process and has indicated that spaces are available currently.

10. **Pupil comment/query:** We are part of a federation of schools and when we moved from our primary to this school it was made easier because we already knew the school, other children and the staff. This can't happen if we move to Margam – it will be too far and younger children won't have the opportunity for the good transition we had.

Officer Response: It is recognised that the work that has gone on between the secondary and the four primaries in the federation has been successful and many children have benefitted from the transition work that has taken place. However other secondary schools also work hard at transition and have good results and it would be expected that the good practice that has taken place here in previous years can be used to ensure that future transition into the new school at Margam can also be good.

11. **Pupil comment/query:** Why did you put the news on Facebook before we knew? If the decision is made to close our school will we be the first to know?

Officer Response: As the final decision will be made in a public meeting it would be very difficult to ensure that the school would hear about the decision before anyone else. When decisions are taken by the Council – such as the decision to consult on this proposal – members of the public and the press are able to attend and hear what is being discussed. This means that anyone present can share the information on Facebook, Twitter or through any other means of communication often before those involved know what has been decided.

12. **Pupil comment/query:** What about the adventure resort that is opening up in this area? If the school closes will the land be used for that? We will need this school if more people come to the area.

Officer Response: This proposal is not linked in any way to the adventure resort. It is possible that the resort may take a long time to be developed and the impact of this on the area may not be felt for a number of years.

13. **Pupil comment/query:** Year 8 and 9 are very important years, we will be half way through GCSEs – what arrangements will be made for us? We have a vertical curriculum – what will happen in YCB? Will we be disadvantaged?

Officer Response: If this proposal is approved and the school closes in 2019 the current Year 9 cohort will be Year 11, and the current Year 8 pupils will be in Year 10 - both year groups will be preparing for GCSEs. All steps will be taken to make sure that everything is in place for those pupils to ensure minimal disruption – and plans need to be put in place as early as possible so that both schools can work together to achieve this. Early discussions are vital so everyone involved can understand the implications of the vertical curriculum and possible impacts on pupils.

14. **Pupil comment/query:** Why do you want us to move a year after the new Margam School opens – we will be different to the other pupils? What about uniform? How will we make friends? Are we different? Will we be bullied?

Officer Response: There is no reason for delaying pupils move into the new school for a year other than the need to make sure there is enough time to ensure good plans and systems are in place for the transition to be as successful as possible. It is not because pupils from the upper Afan valley are different to those in Port Talbot or elsewhere. If the proposal is approved then it is expected that during the year 2018 -2019 work will take place to bring the two schools together, for staff to meet to discuss individual pupils and to work out any difficulties that may be identified. Part of that process will be making sure that pupils get to know each other and that work takes place to build positive relationships. The new school will have a new uniform which pupils currently attending Dyffryn and Groes will have to wear when they move in to the school in autumn term 2018, and this would be the same for pupils moving in at a later date.

**Consultation on the future of secondary education
in the upper Afan Valley**

Officer notes of the meeting with the temporary governing body of Ysgol Cwm Brombil held at 5.15 p.m. on Monday, 29th January 2018 at St David's Church Hall, Margam

Present: Aled Evans (AE), *Director of Education, ELLLS*
Andrew Thomas (AT), *Head of Transformation, ELLLS*
Richard Gordon (RG), *Strategic School Improvement Programme, ELLLS*

Mair John (MJ), *Chair of Governors, Temporary Governing Body of Ysgol Cwm Brombil*
Governors, *Temporary Governing Body of Ysgol Cwm Brombil*

Introduction:

1. AE thanked the governors for the opportunity to meet with them to discuss the proposal for the upper Afan Valley which directly impacts Ysgol Cwm Brombil. He pointed out that this was an opportunity for governors to raise matters needing clarification and for officers to hear the views of governors on the Council's proposal to close Cymer Afan Comprehensive school and to provide for pupils from the upper Afan Valley at Ysgol Cwm Brombil.

The proposal:

2. AT introduced explained the consultation process and stated that the consultation will be meaningful and that the process is an opportunity to shape the proposal. The timetable for the process was outlined although this would be determined by the responses received. The role of elected members in the decision making process was explained as was the importance of governors, either collectively or individually, submitting their comments in writing.

3. AT explained that the proposed date for transfer of pupils to Ysgol Cwm Brombil was 1st September 2019. He outlined some of the advantages and disadvantages of this date in managing the transfer. In particular, he highlighted the issues for staff. Should a decision be taken to implement the proposal then some Cymer Afan Comprehensive school staff may seek alternative employment before the school closes which would present a staff management problem for the school. It is also the case that staff at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school will be disadvantaged as the majority of posts at Ysgol Cwm Brombil will be filled before Cymer Afan Comprehensive school closes. He also pointed out that pupils from the upper Afan Valley would be joining the school a year after it had been opened to pupils from the existing catchment area.
4. AT explained the importance of well-planned transition for the pupils of the upper Afan Valley and referred to the excellent work of Ysgol Bae Baglan as an example of successful integration of separate school communities.
5. AT mentioned that the distance between the upper Afan Valley and Margam, and the associated travel time between both, was a matter of concern for the parents and pupils of that area. This was also seen to impact on the ability of pupils to access extra-curricular activities.

Comments/queries & responses

6. **Governor comment/query:** the role of members of the Council in the decision making process was raised.

Officer response: The Education, Skills and Culture Cabinet Board is the decision making body in relation to this proposal although that Cabinet Board's decision will be formally reported to all elected members at an appropriate meeting of the Council.

7. **Governor comment/query:** the travel time and distance was raised as a matter of concern.

Officer response: it is noted that there are contradictory trial journey times for home to school travel and these will be looked into in order to inform the consultation process. An additional trial run is being undertaken to

clarify this matter. It is to be noted that pupils travel similar long distances to other schools within and without the County Borough.

8. **Governor comment/query:** the governors were mindful of setting a start time for Ysgol Cwm Brombil and have deferred a decision on this matter whilst consultation is ongoing.

Officer response: it is to be noted that other schools successfully manage their school day to accommodate pupils travelling to and from school from nearby and far away locations, including ensuring access to extra-curricular activities. This should not present as an insurmountable issue to Ysgol Cwm Brombil.

9. **Governor comment/query:** the opportunity to access 21st century school facilities should be an attraction to parents of the upper Afan Valley and Ysgol Cwm Brombil will be able to offer this experience. The governors will welcome pupils and parents of the upper Afan Valley as full members of the school community.

Officer response: the full support of the governors and staff will be needed to ensure successful transition arrangements are put in place. Should the proposal be implemented then the upper Afan Valley would form part of the area served by Ysgol Cwm Brombil, i.e. the catchment area for the school. In this respect the upper Afan Valley will have equal status to all other areas served by the school and planning and delivery will need to reflect this position. In this regard, the positive approach of the governors of Ysgol Cwm Brombil expressed in this consultation meeting is heartening to note.

**Consultation on the future of secondary education
in the upper Afan Valley**

Officer notes of the meeting with the community held at 6.00 p.m. on Monday
5th February 2018 at Cymer Afan Comprehensive School

Present: Cllr Rob Jones, (RJ) Leader of the Council
Steven Phillips (SP), Chief Executive
Aled Evans (AE), *Director of Education, ELLLS*
Andrew Thomas (AT), *Head of Transformation, ELLLS*
Richard Gordon (RG), *Strategic School Improvement
Programme, ELLLS*

Other officers present: Roger Bowen; Nick Clark; Jon Betts
(responsible for managing microphones and speaker system)

Cedric Burden (CB), *Head Teacher (Temporary)*

Community of the upper Afan Valley and elected representatives

Welcome introduction:

1. CB welcomed everyone to the school and announced emergency evacuation procedures.
2. SP introduced himself, the Leader of the Council and the officers and then outlined the format of the meeting, stating that there would be an introduction by AE followed by questions from the floor. Given the number present, he would take only one question from each speaker initially.

The proposal:

3. AE outlined the purpose of the consultation meeting, emphasising that this is an opportunity to comment on the proposal and to seek clarification on points of detail. He stated that the consultation will be meaningful and recognised that the proposal will inevitably be a cause of

anxiety to parents, pupils and those within the wider community and acknowledged that those directly affected will have already formed strong views on the proposal.

4. AE explained the proposal being consulted upon and difficulties faced by a small school in delivering the full curriculum offer and referred to the greater opportunities available in a new build, 21st Century School setting with a larger pupil cohort and staff complement. He commented on the high quality of the staff at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school. He also commented that maintaining a small secondary school came at a high cost compared to other schools in the County Borough.
5. AT urged those present to read the consultation document and to submit their comments on the proposal as these would be read by the Members of the Council and would help inform any decision they take.

Comments/queries & responses

6. **Comment/query:** why hasn't the Council invested the money it receives in the Barnet formula in tackling deprivation in the upper Afan Valley?

Response: the Council has invested in the area. The reference to deprivation is not applicable to the Barnet Formula.

7. **Comment/query:** how can the Council be trusted with the safety of children in the upper Afan Valley when they allow pupils to carry knives in schools?

Response: the incident in question relates the wearing of a Kirpan by a pupil at another NPT school. The police have been fully involved in this matter. The Chief Inspector of Police has visited the school in question and is satisfied that no risk is posed in this instance.

8. **Comment/query:** why is the Council more interested in cost rather than quality?

Response: the Council is responsible for some 20,000 pupils in whose interest it has to act. The cost of providing secondary education in the

upper Afan Valley at £7000 per pupil compared to £4500 for the remaining pupils in the County Borough area is a matter which the Council has to carefully consider.

9. **Comment/query:** the travel time to Ysgol Cwm Brombil is felt to be too onerous

Response: pupils spend time travelling to school at present either walking or on buses. The journey to Ysgol Cwm Brombil would add approximately 25 mins each way to that home to school travel time. The impact of the journey will be further considered before a decision is taken.

10. **Comment/query:** there is a lack of investment by the Council in the upper Afan valley – no library, no swimming pool, no parks, no community centre.

Response: there is no denying that austerity measures have impacted upon the Council which has had to explore alternative means by which services can be made available within communities and the Council has been active in doing this such that services have not been lost to the community

11. **Comment/query:** why cannot we have a 21st century school in the upper Afan Valley?

Response: there is a problem in financing a new build school because of the small number of secondary age pupils involved, a number that is not forecast to increase significantly. A secondary school based on forecasted numbers will not justify the investment needed for a new 21st century school.

12. **Comment/query:** concern expressed about the safety of the route to Margam, particularly on icy roads.

13. **Comment/query:** what is the next highest 'per pupil' cost in NPT schools?

Response: speaker to leave details and a response will be provided.

14. **Comment/query:** how does the Council intend filling the empty spaces at Ysgol Cwm Brombil without upper Afan Valley pupils and how long before it closes if the numbers do not materialise?

Response: experience has shown that new build schools attract additional pupils. There is no concern that the school cannot be filled to capacity.

15. **Comment/query:** how can the high standards achieved by pupils at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school be maintained when the standards at Dyffryn School are not as good?

Response: standards at Dyffryn School are as good. In fact, two years ago Dyffryn achieved the best results in the County Borough.

16. **Comment/query:** pupils will not be able to take part in extra-curricular activities because of the travel involved between home and school.

Response: this is an issue that schools address through a range of means and local arrangements. Schools can organise many activities to take place during the school day. Some schools have set days for after school events and arrange buses to transport pupils. One Neath Port Talbot school organises 3 x buses a week to enable pupils to participate in extra-curricular activities.

17. **Comment/query:** pupils will be leaving in the dark and returning home in the dark. Children will have to get up by 7.00 a.m. What will the Council do to guarantee their safety in crossing the roads?

Response: such guarantees are not possible to give. But general road awareness and parental support is important in such situations.

18. **Comment/query:** the Council is focussing on saving money. Is this more important than the education of children?

Response: the reality is that education costs and needs to be funded. Therefore, money is important. A Council is responsible for ensuring best value in the delivery of education across all 20,000 children and young people.

19. **Comment/query:** the Council made retaining a swimming pool in the area as difficult as possible. Is the Council now doing the same with the school?

Response: despite the views held locally, the Council worked hard to secure a deal on the swimming pool. There are economic challenges facing the Valley, and elsewhere. As a Council we have to use the information available on which to base decisions and Cymer Afan Comprehensive is a school of 250 when it was built for 650.

20. **Comment/query:** a solution would be to bring more children to the upper Afan Valley

Response: all counter proposals will be looked at carefully.

21. **Comment/query:** this proposal does not support the well-being of pupils who will have to travel long distances to get to school, they will be tired and not able to benefit from the time at school. A secondary school is needed in the Valley. What will be the impact on the Valley when the school is taken away?

Response: no decision has been taken; it needs to be pointed out that there is no English-medium secondary school in the upper Swansea (Amman) valley nor in the upper Neath valley.

22. **Comment/query:** why not spend £3m to bring the school up to standard?

Response: the £3m refers to maintenance and repair. It's the cost of making the school warm, watertight and safe. It will not delivery a 21st Century school environment. It will still be an old school building.

23. **Comment/query:** why has the Council never implemented the 'umbrella' federated budget?

Response: the five schools in the upper Afan Valley benefit from being funded as separate schools, as all five budgets will contain the cost of a head teacher for example. The Federated Governing Body is able to pool those budgets and use the money as it sees fit, including employing only one head teacher and using the savings elsewhere. So the federation is funded in a way that is more generous than the funding it would receive as a single school.

24. **Comment/query:** what will be the cost of educating pupils at the new school in Margam?

Response: the budget for 2018 onwards has not yet been fixed but as an estimate it would be about £4500.

25. **Comment/query:** if the upper Afan Valley wins this battle, will the Council come back again and try and close the school?

Response: that will depend on the circumstances the future holds.

26. **Comment/query:** why is the Council investing heavily in Cefn Saeson Comprehensive school when results are not as good as Cymer Afan Comp.?

Response: apart from last year Cefn Saeson results have been good. It provides for over 600 pupils and the buildings need replacing because of their poor condition.

27. **Comment/query:** what about youth clubs?

Response: these can be provided elsewhere in the community

28. **Comment/query:** there is no proposal brought forward by the Council that has not been implemented, the Council has never changed its mind.

Response: the proposal brought forward for merging two primary schools in the Swansea valley is an example where the Council listened to responses of consultation and changed its plans.

29. **Comment/query:** because children will be taken out of the Valley for the education and late returning home from school, they will not be able to participate in locally organised events and the Valley children need to develop their talents.

Response: this is about how activities are organised; going to a school outside of the valley and participating in locally organised activities are not necessarily at odds with one another

30. **Comment/query:** as this is about saving money, when will the Council be asking us to pay for school transport?

Response: so long as the Welsh Government does not change the current rules, school transport will be paid for by the Council

31. **Comment/query:** has the land the school is on been sold to the Adventure Park developers?

Response: the school land has not been sold and this proposal for education is not connected to the Adventure Park proposal.

32. **Comment/query:** the Council has hidden this proposal from the people of the upper Afan Valley for the past 3 years. The consultation on the new school at Margam and this consultation should have been 'open' at the same time as this current process has not given the staff at Cymer Afan Comp. a chance to be involved in decisions about the Margam school. The consultation is not fair and should be thrown out.

Response: complex proposals need time to develop and there is hardly ever a perfect time to bring forward plans for change; these are matters determined by circumstances. If the clock could be turned back, things could have been done differently, but we cannot go back in time so the situation as it stands needs to be managed. This is the opportunity for

the upper Afan Valley to express its views on what is currently being proposed.

33. **Comment/query:** the Council could use its reserves and deprivation grants to sustain the school

Response: the Council has used its reserves to balance its budget in a financially difficult period for local government. Reserves can only be used once and decisions are a matter of achieving a balance of priorities. Money received to support initiatives to tackle deprivation are used for this purpose across the County Borough.

34. **Comment/query:** how will pupils from the upper Afan Valley be guaranteed a place at the new school?

Response: if this proposal is implemented that the catchment area for the new school would include Cymer Afan Comp. and pupils would get catchment area priority for places.

35. **Comment/query:** what will happen if a child is taken ill, parents without cars will not be able to fetch them or if they miss the bus?

Response: this is a situation that schools manage now on a daily basis. The school will have emergency contact numbers for parents and family and where necessary the school will arrange transport. How situations are managed will depend on the circumstances

36. **Comment/query:** suggest putting portakabins on the primary school site and providing for young secondary school pupils there with the 14 and 15 years moving to another secondary school.

Response: alternative proposals will be carefully considered.

37. **Comment/query:** 21st century education is about amazing teachers not just ipads. People choose to live here and there is a fantastic school. We would have to move if the school closes.

Response: no one is being expected to move home. There is an element of choice in where people live and a balance has to be struck about what services a Council can provide in an area.

38. **Comment/query:** will those who submit a written response get a personal reply?

Response: no, all responses will be considered and reported in the consultation report which the Council has to publish

39. **Comment/query:** has the Council considered the rights of the child

Response: before a decision is taken by Members the relevant impact assessments will be completed.

40. **Comment/query:** the report states that the Faith sector will be consulted but this has not happened.

Response: the consultation report has been circulated to both the Catholic and Church in Wales Diocesan education boards.

41. **Comment/query:** the air quality in Port Talbot is not good. In the upper Afan Valley, where children live, is a healthy environment.

Response: air quality is regularly measured and meets acceptable standards.

42. **Comment/query:** there are concerns over the way the pupil views were collected.

Response: the deputy Headteacher of Cymer Afan Comp. was present throughout.

43. **Comment/query:** the Council has not handled this process at all well and is taking no notice of what we have to say. Cymer Afan Comp. is the best school in Neath Port Talbot. This proposal is all about saving money. We need to stand up and challenge this proposal.

Estyn response to the proposal on the future of secondary education in the upper Afan Valley.

This report has been prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education and Training in Wales.

Under the terms of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and its associated Code, proposers are required to send consultation documents to Estyn. However, Estyn is not a body which is required to act in accordance with the Code and the Act places no statutory requirements on Estyn in respect of school organisation matters. Therefore as a body being consulted, Estyn will provide their opinion only on the overall merits of school organisation proposals.

Estyn has considered the educational aspects of the proposal and has produced the following response to the information provided by the proposer and other additional information such as data from Welsh Government and the views of the Regional Consortia which deliver school improvement services to the schools within the proposal.

Introduction

The proposal by Neath and Port Talbot County Council is to close Cymer Afan Comprehensive School on 31st August 2019 and to make arrangements for pupils to attend the new all-aged school at Margam in a new, purpose built facility.

Summary

The proposal asserts reasonably that Cymer Afan Comprehensive School is a small school. It is one of only five established mainstream secondary schools in Wales with fewer than 300 pupils. It is Estyn's view that overall the proposal is likely to at least maintain the standards of education and provision in the area.

Description and benefits

The proposer has given a clear rationale for the proposal's expected

benefits in relation to offering a well-resourced environment which is able to accommodate pupils from the upper Afan Valley.

The proposer notes appropriately the advantages of the proposal. This includes directly addressing the issue of unfilled places at Cymer Afan Comprehensive School. With the physical capacity to accommodate 641 pupils the school has a significant surplus capacity of 64% (412 places). Even at the forecasted high in 2021 there will still be 58% surplus capacity at the school. This is reflected further in the high 'per pupil' funding at Cymer Afan Comprehensive school which is significantly higher than the average for the Council's schools, a cost that has increased annually. According to the proposal, since 2015/16 'per pupil' funding at Cymer Afan Comprehensive School has exceeded the average for the Council's schools by nearly 60%. The proposer forecasts that the 'per pupil' costs at the new school at Margam, will be at or below the local authority average. Based on the local authority average alone there will be annual revenue saving of £2,635 per pupil. With 226 pupils currently on roll, the proposal notes that this equates to a total annual saving of £595k.

The proposer also notes that the number of pupils attending the upper Afan Valley federation, particularly at secondary level, has not increased since its establishment and its not forecast to increase significantly going forward. The provider argues that this brings into question the sustainability of 11-16 age provision given that there are other secondary schools within reasonable travelling distance, which could accommodate the pupils of the upper Afan Valley.

The proposal indicates that the current site is categorised as overall building condition C which means poor. The proposer asserts that elements of the building are exhibiting major defects and/or not operating as intended. In addition, the proposal affirms that revenue costs associated with maintaining a small secondary school are significantly higher than for those schools with greater pupil numbers. According to the proposer, closing Cymer Afan Comprehensive School will remove £3m of backlog maintenance and accessibility liabilities.

The proposer has identified suitably the disadvantages of the current proposal, which focuses on the impact on pupils and parents due to the

increase in journey time.

Additionally, this would result in an annual increase in travel costs of £76k for the authority. The pupils affected would be the current year 7, 8 and 9 pupils as well as year 5 and 6 pupils.

The proposer has recognised further possible risks to include resistance to change leading to lack of pupil, parent and staff support as well as staff anxiety about job security and job losses. The proposer notes clearly that should a decision be taken to close the school, staff with contracts attached to Cymer Afan Comprehensive School will be declared redundant.

The proposer also identifies that the removal of Cymer Afan Comprehensive School from the federation would also change the current federated structure and operational arrangements. However, this proposal would not have a significant effect on the present federated governing body. The federation could continue following the closure of Cymer Afan Comprehensive School, however, a revised structure and purpose would be needed.

In addition, it is also noted in the proposal that the closure would impact on the wider community with community provision and activities that have been developed over an extended period at the school site being displaced under this proposal and relocated from the school to alternative locations.

The cost of the £30m new build investment at the new school at Margam is not dependent on this proposal.

Educational aspects of the proposal

The proposer makes appropriate reference to the outcomes of the schools' most recent Estyn inspection in April 2015. It identifies correctly that both the current performance and the prospects for improvement were judged to be adequate. Estyn monitored the school and in November 2016 the school was judged to have made good progress in respect of the key issues for action.

The proposer also notes that the Estyn report refers to leadership and management at Cymer Afan Comprehensive School being adequate and

not having enough impact in ensuring good progress in indicators that include English and Maths. However, results at key stage 4 at Cymer Afan Comprehensive School have shown a steady improvement over three years in all key indicators with a significant rise in 2016. The school has experienced some instability in recent years with a number of changes in key leadership roles and recruitment of a permanent Headteacher has proven to be difficult.

The proposer also refers briefly to the schools' categorisation within the National School Categorisation System. In 2016/2017 the school was judged to be in the yellow support category which indicates it is an effective school with many aspects of performance which are self-improving.

The same arrangements will apply at the new school at Margam for pupils with special educational needs. Cymer Afan Comprehensive School currently teaches Welsh as a second language. This arrangement will continue under the proposal.

