

## **Decision Statement**

### **Proposal 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, and to close Cymer Afan Comprehensive.**

Determination of this proposal complies with statutory requirements under the Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and Welsh Government's Code on School Organisation.

At its meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2018, the Council's Cabinet received a report on the proposal to close Cymer Afan Comprehensive school and to make arrangements for the pupils to receive their secondary education at Ysgol Cwm Brombil. This meeting followed the end of the period for the submission of objections.

Cabinet Members determined to implement the proposal effective from the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019.

Having carefully considered the proposal, the statutory objections, advice from Estyn and the supporting evidence from Council officers, Cabinet Members approved implementation of the proposal. The decision will enable the Council to comply with the legislative requirements necessary to facilitate the implementation of the proposal which will assist the Council in meeting its duty to secure efficient education in its area.

In reaching their decision, Cabinet Members gave consideration to the following:

- **Objections to the proposal**

Cabinet members noted that 433 written objections were received, together with a petition 'Opposing the closure of Cymer Afan Comprehensive School' of 2,007 signatures. The objections were made available to Members for perusal prior to the Council's Cabinet meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> September.

- **Education**

Objections received focus on the risk that pupils transferring from Cymer Afan Comprehensive to Ysgol Cwm Brombil will not continue to receive high standards of teaching or attain high outcomes. Additionally objectors fear that pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) will not be supported appropriately and that a larger school cohort would mean less care and attention for individuals, which is more important for pupils who reside in the upper Afan Valley due to high levels of deprivation experienced.

Officers do not believe that this proposal would be detrimental to standards or outcomes, but rather that this will significantly improve educational opportunities for upper Afan Valley pupils. Pupils at Dyffryn School (proxy for Ysgol Cwm Brombil) have consistently attained high standards at the end of key stage 4, the school has a good track record at supporting vulnerable pupils, including those with ALN and has demonstrated that the school offers a broad and balanced curriculum. With the addition of a new build 21st

century school building in 2018 pupils will have the added benefits that this can offer, further enhancing and improving educational opportunities, including a wider range of support services and greater access to specialist staff.

- **Transport and Travel**

There are no specified travel time or travel distance limits that determine the length of journey between home and school, and guidance issued in Wales relies on an assessment of reasonable journey time. The distance between Gwynfi, the furthest community in the upper Afan Valley from Margam, is approx. 13 miles with a journey time, including stops, of approx. 45 minutes. This journey distance and times are similar to other journeys undertaken by pupils across the county borough.

Arrangements for extra-curricular activities are not an uncommon challenge for schools that have pupils attending from outside the immediate area of the school and schools ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to participate.

- **Federation**

There are no plans currently to close any of the four primary schools, and while it is recognised that removing the secondary school will significantly alter the character of the current federation it is the view of officers that there is much to be gained from continuing with a federated arrangement with the primary schools in the upper Afan Valley.

Transition between the upper Afan Valley primary schools and Ysgol Cwm Brombil should be no less effective than it is currently, with careful planning and organisation by the schools involved. It is the case that all secondary schools in Neath Port Talbot successfully manage transition with primary schools some of which may be some distance away and there is nothing to suggest this wouldn't be the case in this instance.

- **Finance**

Revenue costs associated with maintaining a small secondary school are significantly higher than for those with greater pupil numbers. It is the case that the high costs of delivering education in Cymer Afan Comprehensive are not related to the levels of deprivation but to the need to provide basic education offer which all pupils are entitled to and receive across Neath Port Talbot.

The savings made from school reorganisation proposals are ring fenced to the Council's budget for education.

The cost of the 30m new build investment at Ysgol Cwm Brombil is not dependent on this proposal.

- **Wider Community**

Objections received focus on the impact of the proposal on the wider community, including fears that local businesses will suffer and that families will choose to move from the area. While children of secondary school age will be educated outside of the valley, under this proposal, it is still the case that they will return to their communities at the end of their school day and during holiday periods, and will be able to participate in community life in the same way as they do currently.

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 principally be one of securing the best educational offer for pupils.

## **Documentation**

The Cabinet report and associated appendices which set out in detail the case for implementing the proposal is accessible using the following link

<https://democracy.npt.gov.uk/documents/g8291/Public%20reports%20pack%2006th-Sep-2018%2009.31%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10>

## **Strategic School Improvement Programme**

