

CALL-IN RE WELSH-MEDIUM CATCHMENT REVIEW - ITEM 5 CABINET 21 MAR 2016

Dear Paul

The following forms the basis of the call-in request. I am mindful that this call-in may delay implementation, if the original decision is upheld, until Sep 2018 as the determination year normally is scheduled to cut off at April 15th. I am advised that this cannot be extended but would ask that dispensation be sought to extend this deadline given the circumstances e.g. election purdah.

I am particularly mindful of the Ysgol Glantaf location with two nearby single form entry primaries (Ysgol Pencae and Ysgol Glan Ceubal) as well as two single-form entry EM schools nearby as well. I note from looking at the map and reports that the Council is sustaining FOUR single-form entry schools on four sites in such a relatively small geographical area: I would not be surprised if consolidation into two double-form entry schools may have to be considered as Government funding continues to be cut in the foreseeable future.

BACKGROUND

As you know, I have had representations from the parents, Chair, governors and teachers relayed to me primarily via a senior teacher at Ysgol Plasmawr. I have also been informed that the number of respondents opposed to the change was around 300 with a petition with over 400 signatures which was documented in the report. Whilst most respondents do understand that a consultation is NOT a referendum and whilst I appreciate those in favour are less likely to respond, I feel that a substantial volume of concerns raised by stakeholders to this point does merit further considerations during a call-in.

Ysgol Plasmawr has worked on the 14-19 agenda for many years in partnership with Ysgol Glantaf and I am assured that all support the Authority's need to have a clear strategy for the development of Welsh Medium education in Cardiff. It is also widely acknowledged that rising demand suggests that a 4th secondary school may be required but this will need longer-term planning and extensive consultation. Furthermore, the timing and scale of the Plasdŵr developments along Llantrisant Road will also make it difficult to predict the future demand and pressures upon the schools concerned in the medium to long-term.

They acknowledge the over-supply concerns encapsulated in Table 8 of the report (see below) but argue that moving a school catchment area for the sake of 30 or so pupils for 2 years when numbers are projected to dip at Ysgol Plasmawr in 2018 seems to be a reactive and short-term decision and may create further issues especially as many families may well choose to follow siblings to Plasmawr in 2017 and 2018.

It is further acknowledged by many that the council has a duty to operate on a council-wide basis with the difficulty of dealing with three tiers of sometimes conflicting placement allocations involving two mediums of education and faith-based schools. It is appreciated that Government guidelines prescribe certain actions but there are key issues that they wish me to raise at the call-in on their behalf which are as follows.

1. CONSIDERATION OF POST-2017 DATA:

It can be argued that the proposal was based on balancing the demand for and supply of school places yet appeared to consider data only for 2017/18 despite the projections clearly showing that the demand and supply for places at Ysgol Glantaf (see table 6 below) will balance naturally without any changes in catchment areas by 2019/20:

Enters Sec Ed	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Catchment:							
Glan Ceubal*	23	18	16	26	21	25	30
Glan Morfa	19	16	22	25	28	21	22
Melin Gruffydd	42	43	49	45	46	39	47
Mynydd Bychan*	25	18	24	21	31	31	25
Pwll Coch**	25	48	38	47	51	48	52
Y Wern	50	54	52	48	63	65	65
Total	184	197	201	212	240	229	241
Catchment surplus/ deficit	56	43	39	28	0	11	-1

I would certainly welcome clarification as to why the report states in paragraph 118 that *'the admission arrangements that may be required beyond 2017/18 cannot be consulted on at this time'*. This appears to be in sharp contrast to the Published Admission Numbers or PANs arguments used in discussing Fitzalan and Cantonian catchment areas (paragraph 35 of the report) where projections for 2019/20 are used.

They conclude, as I do, that admission arrangements are subject to future PAN data and have referred me to the precedent for the use of longer-term projections set in July 2014 with the report on the provision of Welsh medium education in Llanishen which used projections for WM primary education provision (which is difficult to predict) up to 2019/20 - a full five years after the report.

They also cite the 3 years worth of future projections that were used in consultation prior to establishing Ysgol Glan Ceubal in 2014 where it was stated that *'The permanent establishment of Ysgol Glan Ceubal at 1 form of entry is expected to closely match the future demand for places at the school and from within its catchment area.'*

I note demand for places is evaluated within the Cabinet report, pages 16 to 19; projections are clearly set out for September 2015 until 2021 (i.e. seven years after Reception intake of 2015) and is therefore the longest projection period available using verified school census data). I also note the combined demand from within the two catchments would exceed places available at entry to Year 7 in 2019 so I would expect there would be solid data on which to query and question admission arrangements as these are number-dependent.

I appreciate Ysgol Glantaf currently has surplus spaces across the school having operated at 6FE in recent years and could, if necessary; admit in excess of 8FE at that point in 2021.

However, there is also surplus at Ysgol Bro Edern (to the East of Glantaf) and by 2019 the Council will have greater certainty in respect of LDP developments and numbers and should, in my view, review the potential to add extra forms to Plasmawr and Glantaf for 2021 onwards. I further argue that Ysgol Glantaf could then expand in a more manageable fashion to an 8+-form entry in 2011 and beyond as the strategic site developments progress.

The Council may argue at this point that Welsh Government legislation may prevent consultations on admission arrangements that could be implemented to balance the Glantaf/ Bro Edern catchments in 2019 e.g. such as transferring the Ysgol Glan Morfa catchment to Ysgol Bro Edern.

I also note the argument that it may not be beneficial to do so at this stage when the catchment population within the current Glantaf catchment would be reduced.

However my primary suggestion of imposing equal form admission caps of 210 on both schools in the short-term will allow a more realistic and far more extensive review in 2019 once timescales and demands from the additional dwellings planned in West Cardiff become evident especially those that will fall within the catchment of Ysgol Plasmawr.

I further agree that it is extremely unlikely that the number of statutory school age pupils on roll at Ysgol Plasmawr would fall by any significant margin and I therefore believe a more cohesive solution – possibly including plans for a fourth secondary school – will be more significantly advanced by then based on more robust PAN data projections.

I must therefore again express sympathy with the argument put by respondents that it seems illogical to use long term projections in most cases yet only short term projections in this one particular case even given the above considerations.

Furthermore, the impacts of the two discussed WM primaries in Central Cardiff may also be a future, and as yet unspecified, factor in the catchment boundary reviews and PANs post 2019 and those pupil numbers may require some clarification during the call-in and again boost the argument that a short term equal admissions policy is appropriate.

2. YSGOL PLASMAWR CAPACITY:

It is accepted that the demand for places at Ysgol Plasmawr shows an increase to 210 in 2017 whilst the intake capacity is set at 180 as a 6 form entry school. This has remained unchanged since 1998 despite three large building projects on site having been undertaken substantially increasing the potential capacity. A 4-storey extension with an additional 8 classrooms has been added since this limit was set and the Waterhall Youth Centre will be taken over by the school this summer adding another 2 additional rooms to the site.

It is acknowledged that the Assembly Government would not easily countenance one school being over-subscribed through inaction whilst a nearby school was under-subscribed so the simple question arising from this is this: why conduct a short-term catchment review at all when resetting the capacity-limit of both schools to 210 each would negate that review. It would also allow a much longer lead time to prepare schools and parents for changes that

development pressures will bring and also allow for thought-through consolidations of single-form entry schools should they ever be required in future.

Table 8: Number of pupils resident in each of the primary school catchment areas within the Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Plasmawr catchment area projected to promote to a Welsh-medium community school							
Enters Sec Ed	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Catchment:							
Coed Y Gof	54	47	53	50	58	61	49
Creigiau	19	18	20	18	19	15	17
Gwaelod Y Garth	17	9	11	10	14	21	17
Nant Caerau	16	16	37	26	31	34	30
Pencaae*	29	26	24	25	29	25	35
Treganna**	50	51	65	64	60	68	80
Total (in County only)	185	161	210	193	211	224	228
Catchment surplus/ deficit	-5	19	-30	-13	-31	-44	-48

Ysgol Plasmawr argues that the capacity intake number is outdated and that the cabinet and committees should have been informed that they believe the school can easily accept 210 pupils and therefore contend that the report assumptions are open to challenge.

If the capacity issues were recognised and addressed then it is argued that this would negate short-term concerns that an over-subscribed Ysgol Plasmawr will have the transport cost implications of Ely and Caerau pupils failing to get into Ysgol Plasmawr and having increased travel times and journeys (and council costs) in order to attend Ysgol Glantaf.

They quote WG School Capacity guidelines that capacity should be decided '*pending extensive discussions with Head and Governors to agree an appropriate way forward within the context of demand for places and the capacity of the premises*' and were concerned that this had not taken place in revising that intake capacity prior to the catchment review.

They point to the report that states that its aim is to address the balance of supply and demand and argue that the most sustainable long-term outcome is to create 3 Welsh medium secondary schools in Cardiff of comparable size to create a better geographical and educational balance in the supply of WM education in the longer term especially as they felt the environmental impact assessments were inadequate i.e. the unquantified statement "*In summary, implementing the proposal would most likely have a positive effect as a net result of pupils using polluting modes of travel.*"

CONSULTATION AND YSGOL PENCAE

I note the arguments around the transfer of Ysgol Pencae and its unique parent-supported and low FSM cohort and I do not believe this to be a major factor in the decision as the data shows, in my view, the FSM data show a minimal benefit/disbenefit. The head of Ysgol Gyfan Glantaf picked up this theme (CA16/WM/47) among others pointing out the FSM argument so I am asking those of you making the decision should not reduce the argument

to the simplistic scenario of two equivalent schools simply wrangling over a 'high performance' feeder primary when the issues are far more complex than that.

I also note the detailed and opposing responses from the heads and chairs of the two affected secondary schools but I draw your attention specifically to the email from The Head of Ysgol Pencae (CA16/WM/372) as critical as he leads the primary school at the centre of the review. Although due process was technically followed it appears from his comments that he was briefed only two days before the consultation began. This could unfortunately have the unintended effect of undermining the reputation of Head and governors as they have would not have a reasonable amount of time, in my view as a governor myself, to discuss such a major matter before the consultation was launched.

The reverse argument about not wanting Ysgol Glantaf to be an 'elite school' is made – again I would ask that it be noted but not made an overriding factor in the decision. More importantly, is the lack of briefing about the longer-term proposals to the governing body and the impact upon parents of years 3-5 that the short notice does not allow them to plan for the impact on their children of groups being split up by changes in parental choices and appeals over sibling cohesion mentioned previously.

I therefore argue that a call-in and my suggestions will allow the governors of Pencae a longer lead in time to consider and adapt to the major changes and pressures in 2019.

Thank you for your kind assistance in this matter. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Regards
Cllr Paul Mitchell
Cllr for Fairwater and Pentrebane
Chair Environmental Scrutiny Committee
Member Audit Committee
Governor Cantonian High School
Governor Fairwater Primary School
