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## CORRESPONDENCE FOLLOWING THE COMMITTEE MEETING

**Committee** COVID-19 SCRUTINY PANEL

**Date and Time of Meeting** TUESDAY, 23 JUNE 2020, 2.00 PM

Please find below correspondence send by the Committee Chair following the meeting, together with any responses received.

For any further details, please contact [scrutinyviewpoints@cardiff.gov.uk](mailto:scrutinyviewpoints@cardiff.gov.uk)

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My Ref: T: Scrutiny/Committees/COVID-19 Panel/20-06-23

Date: 23 June 2020



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Councillor Sarah Merry,  
Cabinet Member, Education, Employment & Skills  
Cardiff Council,  
County Hall,  
Cardiff  
CF10 4UW

Dear Sarah,

### **COVID-19 Scrutiny Panel: 23 June 2020 - Plasdŵr School**

As Chair of the Covid-19 Scrutiny Panel, I thank you for joining our remote Microsoft Teams meeting on 23 June 2020 to support consideration of Cabinet proposals in respect of Plasdŵr School. Members have also asked that you pass on our thanks to Richard Portas and Brett Andrewartha who attended alongside you.

The Panel represents Cardiff's five scrutiny committees and aims to ensure measured and proportionate scrutiny of the Cabinet's business critical decisions. You will be aware that our terms of reference require that we consider all Cabinet reports. We therefore held an additional meeting at short notice to scrutinise this report and we sincerely hope that our observations, comments and recommendations assist the Council to maintain an accountable, open and democratic process in these complex times.

#### **Capturing previous concerns**

The Chair of the Children and Young People (CYP) Scrutiny Committee has asked me to re-iterate the Committee's requests and recommendations following its pre-decision scrutiny of the proposal (January 2020) to establish a new primary school to serve the Plasdŵr housing development. **Members request that CYP is afforded the opportunity of a further update on progress with delivering this school.** Members also re-iterate the Committee's request that the Governing Body for the school clearly reflects the whole school, noting your point that LEA appointments are often made to fill an identified skills gap on the Board. The CYP Committee has

previously expressed concern at the recruitment of staff, requesting that regular updates are provided on progress. We echo their concern, and particularly wish to stress the importance of recruiting the right bi-lingual head with the capability of balancing two school communities to ensure this model of provision is effective.

### **Demand**

Members recognise it is inherently difficult to predict accurately the demand for school places and this difficulty increases when trying to determine whether parents will wish to choose Welsh Medium or English Medium provision. Members note that, for the new primary school in Plasdŵr, the intention is to balance the dual streams and that it is possible to build in the ability to expand school places in the future as needs arise. Members also note that officers recognise the need to improve consultation with parents, in line with Cymraeg 2050 Strategy, to help strengthen predictions on demand for Welsh Medium places. **Members request that in the response to this letter further information is provided on the proposals to improve consultation with parents.**

### **Capacity**

Members note that there is sufficient capacity in English Medium and Welsh Medium schools in the locality of Plasdŵr to accommodate requirements from this development for nursery, reception, Year 1 and Year 2 whilst the new school is delivered and thereafter if parents wish to keep children in these schools.

### **Model of provision**

The Panel notes that inspiration for the proposed model to deliver linguistic excellence came from the Spanish Basque region and has supported a fundamental shift toward bilingualism. You acknowledged that the political landscape of the Basque region is very different, but applying this model has seen a growth in its language from 20% to around 90% of children in the region being educated through Basque and Spanish, thereby increasing levels of bilingualism. We would be interested to hear whether you have researched other areas, such as Canada and India, and whether you have examined why in fact other regions introduced the model. We were also interested to hear that other parts of Wales use this model successfully. **Members encourage further research, and look forward to additional information on the numbers of schools using the model in the**

**Spanish Basque region. We recommend that you closely evaluate the effectiveness of this model of provision for primary education.**

### **Objections to the Proposals**

The Panel heard that the Council received three objections to its proposals by the closing date of the statutory notice. We note you consider that all three were very similar however we feel it would be more transparent, and good practice, to have included all three in the full in the report to Cabinet. **Members request that you share those not appended to the report.**

### **Delivery of New School**

Members explored concerns that the Covid-19 pandemic will affect delivery of the new school and that the developer may seek to alter the existing s106 agreement, resulting in changes to provision and/ or increased costs to the Council. Members note officers responses that they are in discussions with the developer to understand the true impact of Covid-19 and how to mitigate this by improving statutory processes, construction processes, programming and delivery in order to reduce slippage. Members note that the developer proposals to date do not impact the scale of provision or require additional monies from the Council. **Members request that a report be brought to this Panel (or relevant Scrutiny Committee if they are sitting) if and when any changes are proposed to the existing s106 agreement and/ or planning obligations.**

Once again, on behalf of all scrutiny members, my sincere thanks for your support of effective internal challenge in difficult times. This letter requires a response please, regarding our recommendation and requests for additional information.

Yours sincerely,



**COUNCILLOR DAVID WALKER**

**CHAIR, POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

cc Members of the Covid-19 Scrutiny Panel  
Members of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee  
Richard Portas, Programme Director, School Organisation Programme  
Brett Andrewartha, School Organisation Programme Planning Manager  
Davina Fiore, Director, Governance & Legal Services  
Gary Jones, Head of Democratic Services  
Joanne Watkins, Cabinet Office Manager  
Andrea Redmond, Committee Support Officer

By virtue of paragraph(s) 14, 16, 21 of Part(s) 4 and 5 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

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