

COVID-19 SCRUTINY PANEL

23 JUNE 2020

Present: Councillor Walker(Chairperson)
Councillors Bridgeman, Howells, Jenkins and Patel

6 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Nick Batchelor.

7 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received

8 : MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

9 : CABINET AGENDA ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION (TO FOLLOW)

New Primary School Provision to serve parts of Creigiau/St Fagans, Radyr/Morganstown and Fairwater.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sarah Merry, Deputy Leader, Richard Portas Programme Director School Organisational Planning and Brett Andrewartha Team Manager School Organisational Planning and Liz Weale Operational Manager Procurement and Partnerships Legal Services to the meeting.

The Chairperson invited Councillor Merry to make a statement in which she said that even though we were currently in very unusual circumstances, this was another stage in the development of the new school; adding that it was another new LDP school, which would be two form entry, dual stream and include a nursery.

Explaining the rationale behind dual stream, Councillor Merry referred to overall supply around the site and not wanting to undermine the existing schools, whilst providing parental choice. The flexibility and the opportunity to change the balance of Welsh/English provision in response to demand was also outlined.

Richard Portas added that the report has been through two Cabinet meetings and consultation at length; this was the end of the process and all queries raised from previous reports had been addressed in this report. It was noted that Cardiff was recording a 17% uptake in Welsh language provision and this new school provided an opportunity to drive that much higher.

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members as follows:

Members noted that this had previously been scrutinised at Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and that a letter had been send to Councillor Merry asking for a further report on the recruitment of Staff and Governors for the school. Members were advised that there was no date of opening in the report due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, but that a further report on recruitment could be brought

back to Committee. It was noted however that there would definitely be Parent Governors, but other Governors in each strand should be recruited on skills and skills gaps. It was stressed that the balance needed to be right and not dominated by either medium.

Members and Officers discussed the importance of the Head Teacher recruitment in that the Head Teacher would need to fully understand the model and the vision of the school, and as this was a new example of this type of school in Cardiff it would need constant monitoring and be a success if it was to become a model for the future.

Members noted the delivery of the school was predicated on a S106 agreement and asked about the risks if the applicant decided to vary the s106 agreement due to the pandemic and the decline in the housing market. Officers explained that discussions were ongoing to understand the true impact of the pandemic, but there were multiple ways of mitigating delays through the process and programming from a technical and practical perspective. Varying the S106 is what the developer had put to the table, there will inevitable be some impact but currently the development is progressing and there are no agreed proposals for variation at the moment.

Members asked if there was a contingency plan if there was a delay on opening of one year. Officers explained that school places are predicated on the need of the housing developments coming through; homes built provide a yield that is there for the school, however pupils could be accommodated elsewhere if needed. It was noted that intakes for 2021/22 City wide were projected to be lower than most recent years so pupils could be accommodated in both local English and Welsh provision schools if needed. When the new school opens it will initially be for Nursery, Reception and Years 1&2.

Members and Officers discussed the Spanish Basque model informing the ethos of the school and noted the very different political history of the two countries. The Cabinet Member explained that to seriously revive the Welsh Language, you cannot totally rely on the Welsh Schools to do it. She added that historically Welsh has been taught in English schools in the same way that modern languages have been taught, which was not ideal; this will provide another option for parents for their children to learn a living language and not just pass an exam in it.

Members asked about any other countries that have this model. The Cabinet Member stated that they had been advised by a research expert on this and as a result the Spanish Basque model was chosen. Officers added that the model had been developed since the 1980's and whilst appreciating the different political landscapes between the two countries, the long-term vision was the same. Currently in Cardiff Welsh speakers sit around 20% and the model had delivered over time up to 90% in Spanish Basque. It was noted also that English with significant use of Welsh model is in use in other parts of Wales and similar models are also in India.

Members considered that the three objections that had been received should have been included in the report for transparency.

Members noted that some children struggle with learning languages and this should be considered.

Members asked what would happen if demand for one stream exceeded demand for the other. The Cabinet Member stated that they are not looking to only provide one school for the housing development overall, as other sites come along, they will reflect the demand and also try to build demand too. It was noted that consultation had been tricky as the houses were not built and no information about who would buy the houses and predicting school places and demand was very challenging. Regarding the capacity of places, the Cabinet member did not see a problem at the moment, birth rates are down and there are school places in other schools; it is all about parental choice, this school would be promoted as a positive/different choice and the ability to expand in the future would be built in.

Members noted that it was stressful for parents to choose which school to send their children to and this was often based on where they live and the local school, however others choose schools based on performance and not necessarily language. The Cabinet Member stated that predicting the strength of parent demand was what they are trying to do. Officers referred to Cymru 2050 and as part of that they surveyed parents in relation to Welsh Language provision and this had been a good indication to help in the planning.

AGREED: to write to the individual Cabinet Members with the Panel's comments, observations and any recommendations they wish to make.

10 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

Cardiff City Transport Services - Update

The Chairperson had agreed that this item should be considered as Urgent to enable a decision to be progressed in a timely manner to support the local transport arrangement during the current COVID-19 Pandemic.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Huw Thomas – Leader, Councillor Chris Weaver Cabinet Member, Paul Orders – Chief Executive and Chris Lee Corporate Director Resources to the meeting.

The Chairperson advised Members that Appendices A &B are not for publication as they contain exempt information of the description contained in paragraphs 14, 16 and 21 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. It is viewed that, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. The Chairperson therefore requested that this item be considered in closed session.

AGREED: to consider this item in closed sessions and to write to the individual Cabinet Members with the Panel's comments, observations and any recommendations they wish to make.

11 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

14 July 2020 at 2pm.

The meeting terminated at 4.00 pm

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