



# CONSULTATION REPORT: ABERSYCHAN BRYNTEG NURSERY AND VICTORIA PRIMARY SCHOOLS

February 2016



TORFAEN  
COUNTY  
BOROUGH



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SIROL  
TORFAEN

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# **1. BACKGROUND**

Torfaen County Borough Council's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools proposals were well received by Welsh Government in 2011. For some parts of Torfaen it will result in new schools but for some local communities it will mean the closure of their schools. This is not something new in Torfaen as since its inception, the council has been carrying out school re-organisation work to upgrade the estate. This has resulted in the closure/amalgamation of some 31 schools with a net reduction of 20 schools overall.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools programme has been well documented, with the council taking the decision to include every school as part of it in October 2010. The council sought the views of all interested parties on its programme during a series of roadshows that were held across the county borough in March 2011.

The outcome of this public engagement was reported to cabinet in July 2011. Subsequent to this meeting, Welsh Government asked councils to revise their original Band A proposals (originally submitted in October 2010) against the following prioritisation criteria:

- The level of match funding required by the council increased from 30% to 50%
- The poorest condition of the estate (prioritisation to reside with the council although the independent school survey data will be applied)
- Surplus capacity – the key indicator being surplus places (both as a percentage and as an estimated actual reduction in a number of places)
- Running efficiencies (e.g. reduction in running costs, backlog maintenance)
- The length of 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Band's B, C and D yet to be determined.

The revised Strategic Outline Programme was approved by Council in November 2011 with the Welsh Government confirming match funding in principle in December 2011.

Torfaen's primary school estate has some schools that:

- Are trying to operate in buildings or grounds which are not fit for purpose and have an unaffordable maintenance backlog
- Are too small to run economically in today's financial climate
- Have significant surplus capacity in their local cluster of schools
- Are not located where the demand for school places is concentrated

The Council had to reduce surplus capacity in its schools and was set targets by the Welsh Government to reach those targets by 2015 and maintain this performance over time.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme in Torfaen and across Wales is intended to tackle these issues in a strategic rather than piecemeal way.

The proposals in relation to Victoria Primary and Abersychan Brynteg Nursery Schools are those as identified in Band A (2014 to 2019) and Band B (2020 – 2022) respectively of the agreed Programme.

These proposals have been brought forward as Welsh Government has now approved in principle the Business Justification Case (BJC) for Cwmffrwdor and Garnteg. However the approval is contingent on managing surplus places in the area.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The consultation on these proposals was undertaken with prescribed consultees contained within the School Organisation Code 2013. A list of those consultees is attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

Consultation was also undertaken with children and young people at Victoria Primary and Abersychan Brynteg Nursery Schools using the Torfaen Play and Short Break Services.

Consultation was conducted through a consultation document and accompanying response form distributed to prescribed consultees. Consultation events were organised at both schools which allowed staff, governors, parents and other interested parties an opportunity to discuss and comment on the proposals.

The consultation ran from Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> November 2015 to Monday 4<sup>th</sup> January 2016, with the following meetings held to support the consultation. Officers attended these meetings to answer questions and ensure all views were recorded.

<b>DAY/DATE</b>	<b>TIME</b>	<b>VENUE</b>	<b>INTENDED AUDIENCE</b>
Thursday 3 <sup>rd</sup> December 2015	3.30pm to 4.30pm	Victoria Primary School, Lower Harpers Road, Abersychan. NP4 8PW	Teaching, non teaching and support staff of Victoria Primary School
Thursday 3 <sup>rd</sup> December 2015	4.45pm to 5.45pm	Victoria Primary School, Lower Harpers Road, Abersychan. NP4 8PW	The Governing Body of Victoria Primary School
Thursday 3 <sup>rd</sup> December 2015	6.00pm to 7.30pm	Victoria Primary School, Lower Harpers Road, Abersychan. NP4 8PW	Parents/carers of children attending Victoria Primary School; All other interested parties.
Monday 7 <sup>th</sup>	3.30pm to	Brynteg	Teaching, non teaching and support staff of Brynteg

December 2015	4.30pm		Nursery School, High Street, Abersychan. NP4 7DG	Nursery School
Monday 7 <sup>th</sup> December 2015	4.45pm 5.45pm	to	Brynteg Nursery School, High Street, Abersychan. NP4 7DG	The Governing Body of Brynteg Nursery School
Monday 7 <sup>th</sup> December 2015	6.00pm 7.30pm	to	Brynteg Nursery School, High Street, Abersychan. NP4 7DG	Parents/carers of children attending Brynteg Nursery School All other interested parties.

The publication of a consultation document is central to the consultation process for school reorganisation prescribed by Welsh Government. The consultation document outlined the changes being considered, the rationale for these, details of the consultation process and incorporated a response form. Consultees were advised of the availability of an online version to complete and also contact addresses to send in comments via e-mail.

The consultation process was extensively promoted online, via the Torfaen Council website and social media channels, and also received coverage in the local press.

### **3. RESULTS AND COMMENTS**

The Local Authority received a number of responses to the consultation exercise.

A file of all the comments and views received during the consultation period has been made available to Elected Members as part of this process and, before any decisions are made.

A list of those who responded to the consultation is summarised at Appendix 2.

38 people signed the attendance sheet for the public meeting at Victoria Primary, and 5 at Abersychan Brynteg Nursery. 27 pupils submitted comments during the consultation period, together with 96 submissions from individuals, couples, groups and other organisations.

A number of questions and comments were raised which along with the Local Authority responses are summarised below.

<b>1 EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES/SCHOOL PERFORMANCE</b>	
<b>QUESTION/COMMENT</b>	<b>ANSWER/RESPONSE</b>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is a 420 place primary school the optimum size? What evidence supports this?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Estyn’s report “School size and educational effectiveness” (December 2013) reported that large primary schools, defined as those having more than 300 pupils, were found to perform better.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When will a full analysis of the performance of schools affected be carried out?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The information contained in the consultation document indicates that it should be possible to at least maintain, if not better outcomes for learners as a result of the proposals. This issue is something that Estyn has commented on and this response can be found later in this consultation report.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When will the implications for outcomes be analysed and published?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The council believes outcomes will not be adversely affected. Following the conclusion of the consultation period we also now have Estyn’s view on this issue.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What will be done to fully consider the impact of the proposals to ensure delivery of the full curriculum at Foundation Phase and other Key Stages?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are no anticipated barriers to delivery of the curriculum arising from the proposals. As a statutory consultee for the proposals, Estyn has replied and indicated that it believes that the standards of leadership and provision at Garnteg Primary School are likely to maintain or improve the outcomes for pupils.. Furthermore it has stated that the proposal is unlikely to have a negative impact on any other schools or education provider in the area.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Given the closure that is now being proposed, what will be done to consider the relative performance of the affected schools, and the impact on displaced pupils? Will Torfaen be commissioning an independent assessment?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The quality of education and diversity of education of the schools is detailed in the consultation document (pages 21-33).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There will be a drop in standards as larger schools do not perform as well as smaller ones. What work has the council undertaken to look at performance of primary schools with over 401 places compared to those</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The council monitors performance in every aspect of education e.g. FSM, vulnerable children, etc. in all of it’s schools regardless of the size. The National School categorisation process also monitors and evaluates each</li> </ul>

<p>in the 301 – 400 place category.</p>	<p>school’s performance. The National school Categorisation System is based on three steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Step one: is a data driven element that is provided by Welsh Government based on an agreed set of criteria for both primary and secondary schools;</li> <li>• Step two: is led by consortia and takes into account schools’ self-evaluation and capacity to self-improve in relation to leadership and teaching and learning;</li> <li>• Step three: is led by consortia and generates two grades - a letter ‘A-D’ based on schools’ ability to improve and a coloured support category. The coloured support category for each school triggers a bespoke programme of support, challenge and intervention. The support category is also used by consortia to plan and deploy their resources.</li> </ul> <p>The majority (7 schools out of 9) of our larger schools (with over 401 NOR) are categorised as Yellow which means:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) They are effective schools</li> <li>ii) They have secured good levels of outcomes in key indicators</li> <li>iii) They know and act to address areas in need of improvement</li> <li>iv) They have many aspects of their performance which are self-improving</li> <li>v) They seek tailored challenge and support and deploy this.</li> </ol> <p>Evidence locally therefore supports Estyn’s own conclusion, outlined in its document, “School size and educational effectiveness” (December 2013), that large schools tend to perform better than small schools in terms of</p>
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	learner outcomes and inspection outcomes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None of the three schools are “small” schools as defined by Estyn</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is correct. Estyn defines a small school as up to 100 and a medium school as up to 300. Large schools tend to perform better than small schools in terms of learner outcomes and inspection outcomes.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Victoria Primary School has a lower ratio of Teachers to FSM pupils, which means that these pupils have more 1:1 contact with their teacher. This situation will worsen if the proposal proceeds with higher numbers of FSM pupils in Garnteg, potentially hindering improvements in education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Garnteg Primary School has around 40% of pupils that are eligible for free school meals. This is higher than the average for Wales (21%). The school is however categorised as a Green school which means: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) It is a highly effective school</li> <li>ii) They have a track record in sustaining a high level of outcomes</li> <li>iii) They know themselves well and identify and implement priorities</li> <li>iv) They demonstrate resilience at all levels</li> <li>v) They are rewarded with greater autonomy</li> <li>vi) They will be challenged to move towards or sustain excellence</li> <li>vii) They have the capacity to lead and to contribute to support</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Staff to pupil ratios would be determined during the transition phase, but there is no evidence to suggest outcomes for learners would be jeopardised and Estyn supports that view.</p>
<b>2 BUILDING CONDITION/MAINTENANCE</b>	
<b>QUESTION/COMMENT</b>	<b>ANSWER/RESPONSE</b>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What criteria are used to judge “not fit for purpose” in respect of buildings and grounds?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welsh Government commissioned an independent assessment of all schools across Wales before the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools programme proposals were submitted in 2011. The surveys looked at building condition, sufficiency, suitability and sustainability. The council also submits annual updates on the condition of its schools to Welsh Government, which pick up any significant deterioration or improvements.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the maintenance backlog for Victoria? Why has it built up?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The maintenance backlog for Victoria is £265,530. Prior to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools programme funding for capital investments in Wales was insufficient to manage the decline, and took the form of an annual bidding process. As a result many schools across Wales had maintenance backlogs when the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme was launched by Welsh Government.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there an intention to commission an independent survey of the fabric of the existing Victoria School building?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No, a further survey would not highlight anything that we are not already aware of.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You talk about the condition of the buildings at Victoria Village School and Brynteg Nursery. What about the condition at Garnteg and Cwmffrwdroer?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Garnteg Primary</u> was built in 1995 and occupies a site of 6.63 acres.  The school is a modern single storey premises built on two levels over a sloping site. It is a brick and block construction (cement rendered and painted externally) under a pitched composite slate roof. The school is set on a large landscaped site, with grassed sports pitches, tarmacadam yard areas and a feature pond. The School also has a specialist climbing wall.  Although single storey it is on two levels with a stair-lift to allow DDA access.  Welsh Government appointed surveyors categorised the school buildings/site as a Category B school (Satisfactory) in 2010.  Condition and suitability is fairly good as it is only 20 years old, but will require work over the next few years. For Garnteg, the maintenance backlog is estimated at</li> </ul>

	<p>£121,000 and backlog issues include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Routine and planned maintenance</li> <li>ii) Pre paint repairs and external redecoration</li> </ul> <p><u>Cwmffrwdoer Primary</u> was built in 1983 and occupies a site of 3.12 acres.</p> <p>The school is a modern single storey building, constructed of brick and block elevations under a pitched bitumen slate roof. It has powder coated aluminium window panels. It is set on a landscaped site on the edge of the development boundary. It has a tarmac surfaced yard.</p> <p>Welsh Government appointed surveyors categorised the school buildings/site as Category C (Poor) in 2010.</p> <p>Although DDA access into the site is poor, access into and around school is reasonable. The buildings are generally considered to be suitable but could be improved.</p> <p>Some ground stabilisation works were undertaken circa 2003 on the site due to old mine workings, and this is considered suitable for this development.</p> <p>The backlog maintenance requirements for Cwmffrwdoer are estimated at £290,000.</p> <p>Maintenance backlog issues include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Replacement of roof (heavily vandalised over the last few years)</li> <li>ii) Mechanical and Electrical Services Infrastructure (the infrastructure is now 30 years old).</li> <li>iii) Windows &amp; Doors</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposals to extend and refurbish these schools was the subject of consultation which began in June 2015. That work is dependent upon decisions to be made about the proposed closure of Victoria and Abersychan Brynteg schools.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should the council not address the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The maintenance backlog in the schools</li> </ul>

<p>option of reducing the backlog of maintenance which is significantly less than the proposed £8M spend?</p>	<p>estate will be reduced if these proposals are implemented, in addition to a significant number of other improvements at Cwmffrwdor and Garnteg schools. The £8m investment in those two schools is considered appropriate and necessary to address the issues the council has in the north of the county borough, and has been approved in principle by Welsh Government.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the council’s interpretation of “fit for purpose”?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The term “fit for purpose” in this instance refers to the council’s vision, supported by Welsh Government, to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) achieve greater economy and efficiency through appropriate sized schools</li> <li>ii) develop a sustainable education system with all schools meeting national building standards</li> <li>iii) create safe learning environments for schools and communities that will enable the successful implementation of strategies for school improvement and better educational outcomes for learners</li> <li>iv) achieve inspirational settings</li> <li>v) provide an outstanding resource for the whole community</li> <li>vi) achieve inclusive settings, providing for the individual learning needs of all pupils.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>3 SCHOOL CAPACITY/NUMBERS ON ROLL/CATCHMENT AREAS/ADMISSIONS</b>	
<b>QUESTION/COMMENT</b>	<b>ANSWER/RESPONSE</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is Victoria school located in an area where demand for school places is concentrated?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victoria school is one of a number of schools in the area, across which the council needs to ensure it can meet that demand in appropriate settings into the future.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the proposals proceed what advice does Torfaen have for parents whose children will be leaving Brynteg in 2016?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choice of school is a matter of parental preference provided there are spaces available in the identified school. The council’s “Parents/Carers Information Booklet” provides details of all schools in the county borough, and the Admissions Team can answer any questions parents</li> </ul>

	might have.,,
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why is the extension at Garnteg not catering for 220+ pupils? Why is there a need to extend Cwmffrwdroer?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If the proposed extension at Garnteg goes ahead the school will provide 420 places in total which will be sufficient to meet the needs of the local community the school serves. The extension at Cwmffrwdroer would provide similarly for its community, and the proposal overall will support strategically, the Welsh Government target of no more than 10% surplus places.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Closing two further schools will reduce choice for parents/carers in the North of the borough. Are the remaining schools as proposed the “right school” in the “right place”?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The council has 3 primary schools and one nursery in this small area of Torfaen, all of which we believe are too small and less viable than larger schools. Against that backdrop it is therefore the view of the council that the remaining schools as proposed would be of the right size in the “right place”</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alternative provision is in less accessible areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The council does not consider access to be a significant barrier to advancing these proposals. A traffic assessment has been carried out which concludes that with the improvements proposed at the two schools the increase in pupil numbers can be accommodated. In terms of children walking to school, if pupils attending their catchment area school live more than 2 miles from that school, or if there is no available safe route to that school (even if it is under the prescribed distance) transport will be provided. A consultation on safe routes will be required if a decision is taken to close the schools once it is known which children will be attending, in accordance with the recommendations of the Learner Travel Measure.</li> </ul>
<b>4 TRAFFIC CONGESTION/ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT</b>	
<b>QUESTION/COMMENT</b>	<b>ANSWER/RESPONSE</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the effect of this proposal on Torfaen’s carbon footprint?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The biggest determinant (almost half) of emissions in schools arises from procurement, but the approach used in Torfaen is unlikely to result in any significant difference between schools.</li> </ul>

	<p>The second largest determinant (just under a third) relates to buildings and it is anticipated there will be some gains resulting from the relative efficiency of current and proposed accommodation once the improvements have been completed. Emissions resulting from travel and transport is typically the third notable contributor (just under a fifth) but could only be determined once it is known who will be travelling where and how they will journey (foot, car, school transport etc), which will be affected in part by parental choice in terms of school and mode of travel. It would also be necessary to know the current choices being made in terms of mode of travel, albeit some of the responses received to the consultation suggest that 70% of learners current journey to school by car. Emissions from waste are negligible and unlikely to be significantly different (pro rata) between schools. End use of the two sites proposed for closure would also have to be factored into the assessment but that will not be known until a decision has been made on whether the schools should close or not.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you be more specific about the expected environmental impact?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is difficult at this point in time to be more specific. There will be a positive impact if the proposals are implemented in terms of heating and lighting of older buildings terminating as pupils transfer to more modern buildings. There could be a negative impact in terms of car journeys, but until the authority knows which school pupils transfer to it will be difficult to measure. That aside, some of the responses received to the consultation suggest that 70% of learners current journey to school by car, so the impact if any could be negligible..</li> </ul>
<b>5 CLASSROOM FACILITIES/AFTER SCHOOL FACILITIES</b>	
<b>QUESTION/COMMENT</b>	<b>ANSWER/RESPONSE</b>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you provide more information on after school facilities at other schools?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A description of pre/after schools facilities at the proposed main receiving school (Garnteg) was provided on page 42 of the consultation document. In summary there is a breakfast club, after school Community First clubs and a range of extra curricular activities also available.</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the consultation event we were told 5 extra classes would be provided, yet the planning application refers to 3. Which is correct?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposal is to establish a 420 place primary school. This will be achieved with a 5 classroom extension to complement the current provision for Reception to Year 6 pupils in the school. The existing accommodation for the nursery will remain unchanged.</li> </ul>
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**6 FINANCIAL VIABILITY**

QUESTION/COMMENT	ANSWER/RESPONSE
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is Victoria running “economically”?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school out turned with a surplus of £67,676 at the end of 2014-15 financial year which is 8.65% of total funding. Governors approved a surplus of £24k for the end of the 2015-16 financial year, which is 3.3% of total funding. We are currently working with the school to produce their medium term financial forecasts.</li> </ul> <p>Estyn’s research has shown that inspection team judgements for value for money closely aligns with the judgements for standards and say that it follows that a higher proportion of large schools are judged to be giving good or better value for money than small and medium-sized schools</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victoria Primary School remains financially viable going into the future</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please refer answer above in relation to the current financial position of the school.</li> </ul>
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**7 CATERING FACILITIES**

QUESTION/COMMENT	ANSWER/RESPONSE
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The catering facilities will not be as good if the proposal proceeds. Victoria has a dedicated canteen building. There is no such provision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although Victoria Primary School does benefit from separate dining facilities, they are housed in sub standard</li> </ul>
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<p>at Garnteg so the school hall has to be used. This is not hygienic.</p>	<p>buildings.</p> <p>Should the proposal proceed, the new facility at Garnteg will be larger overall with adequate space for dining. There will be a newly designed kitchen with new fittings and fixtures, of a size suitable for a 420 place school. The facility will be integrated into the main building, with no need to exit the premises to access it.</p> <p>In addition, the facility will be DDA compliant with the location of toilets to dining being considerably better than current arrangements at Victoria.</p> <p>The main hall will be dual purpose and compliant with environmental health standards for dual use.</p>
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**8 SAFE WALKING ROUTES/HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT PROVISION**

QUESTION/COMMENT	ANSWER/RESPONSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will transport be provided?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transport will continue to be provided in accordance with current policy and prescribed mileage criteria (1 ½ miles from the school before September 2015 and 2 miles after). Where there are no safe walking routes and the home address is under the prescribed mileage, transport will be provided as is the case now.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are no safe walking routes? What about the risks to pedestrians with the extra traffic and congestion in the area? Will there be extra parking?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is not anticipated that the proposals will impact significantly on pupils' journeys to school. Garnteg Primary School the proposed catchment area school, is located approximately 1 mile from Victoria Primary School.</li> </ul> <p>Traffic and parking congestion outside schools at the start and end of the day are acknowledged by the Council. As part of the planning process a Traffic Impact Assessment (TIA) has been carried out to identify traffic and pedestrian movements.</p> <p>Additional parking is proposed within the site (Garnteg) as a consequence of the establishment of a larger school.</p> <p>£250,000 of investment in Safe routes in the community is being delivered in</p>

	<p>Abersychan which will address some of the issues in the locality.</p> <p>The council will also work with the school on its Travel Plan and try to minimise use of vehicles in support of Welsh Government's policy direction.</p> <p>Where there is no safe route the council's transport policy allows for free transport to those affected.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why were the Traffic Impact Assessments not included in the consultation document?</li> </ul> <p>If there are no safe walking routes, has the council considered the cost of transporting safely 100+ children to school?</p> <p>There are concerns about the TIA's for both Cwmffrwdroer and Garnteg?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As required by the School Organisation Code, the consultation document has made reference to and recognises the need to take into account the impact on pupil's journeys to school, school transport provision and safe walking routes to alternative provision.</li> </ul> <p>At the consultation meeting held at Victoria Primary School on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2015, a request was made to provide the specific Traffic Impact Assessments (TIA's) in relation to Cwmffrwdroer and Garnteg and these were made available the next day on the council website.</p> <p>The TIA's have been undertaken by independent professional Highways Engineers and were based on current arrangements around the schools. The observations made have been noted and improvements have been included in the infrastructure of the proposed developments.</p> <p>The overall impact on these schools will depend on which school is attended by pupils should the proposals proceed. Similarly, the assessment of safe routes and transport entitlement assessment for pupils cannot be undertaken until the council knows to which setting displaced pupils decide to go.</p> <p>However, it can be confirmed that If there are no safe routes to the catchment area school transport will be provided in line with current council policy.</p> <p>The council will also continue to work closely with the schools on their travel plans and try to encourage less use of</p>

	vehicles. Welsh Government policy remains not to encourage driving and transport movement around schools.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can you provide more information on Safe routes in the community and where?</li> </ul>	<p>The council can confirm that for a route to be considered safe it must provide (amongst other things) pavements for children to walk on, and we are aware that there are roads in the area where that is not so. If the proposal goes ahead it will be necessary for us to consult on safe routes so that we can determine which children can access Garnteg via a safe route and which children we will need to provide transport for.</p> <p>Information on specific routes will be provided when we know which schools children are attending.</p>
<b>9 THE CONSULTATION/DECISION MAKING PROCESS</b>	
<b>QUESTION/COMMENT</b>	<b>ANSWER/RESPONSE</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will the council publish every consultation response as an appendix to the consultation report, rather than a summary, to make sure that the council is seen as being open and transparent?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Welsh Government's School Organisation Code requires the Authority to publish a consultation report within 13 weeks of the end of this period allowed for responses (and in any event prior to publication of proposals) which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Summarises each of the issues raised by consultees</li> <li>ii) Responds to these by means of clarification, amendment to the proposal(s) or rejection of the concerns, with supporting reasons; and</li> <li>iii) Sets out Estyn's view (as provided in its consultation response) of the overall merits of the proposal(s).</li> </ul> <p>In addition to the above the council will, in this instance and given current resources, make available an electronic copy of the responses received (personal information having been removed) after the consultation has closed.</p> </li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When was this specific option agreed by council?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In November 2011 council agreed to significantly reduce the number of primary schools below 315 places and discontinue standalone nurseries when it settled its 21<sup>st</sup> Century programme, hence these proposals and all the others that have been advanced over the last few years.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We were promised that the notes of meetings with the governing body and those of the meeting with children would be made available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The notes of all the meetings and the outcome of the pupils' workshop are available as appendices to this report.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why hasn't Brynteg Nursery been consulted on separately? When was the decision made to change the proposed closure date?</li> </ul>	<p>The council thinks that this and the proposal for Victoria should be advanced together because Brynteg is the nursery catchment school. Brynteg Nursery was originally proposed for closure between 2015 and 2017 in line with Welsh Government bandings at that time (Band B was 2015 to 2017). When Welsh Government asked the council to revise its original Band A proposals, the time period for Band A projects was delayed from 2012 to 2014 (with a resultant impact on Bands B, C and D). The new Band B period was therefore 2020 to 2022, however the Council is of the opinion that the proposal can now be progressed as alternative provision will be available, which was the original intention.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The consultation document is not an easy read. There are abbreviations that are not fully explained</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The consultation document must contain specific information as defined and required in the School Organisation Code. This means that a significant amount of information must be provided to support the consultation process and to ensure that stakeholders are fully able to engage in the process.</li> </ul> <p>In terms of the abbreviations, a key for the educational terms is provided on page 21 of the consultation document, but the following is provided for clarity:</p> <p>DDA(page 8) – Disability Discrimination Act</p> <p>HSCWB(page 12) – Health Social Care and Well Being</p> <p>SEF(page 12) – School Effectiveness Framework</p> <p>CSSIW(page 12) – Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales</p> <p>CSA(page 14) – Childcare Sufficiency Assessment</p> <p>FSM(page 27) – Free School Meals</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Given the alternative proposals a new consultation should be launched.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At the end of consultation period allowed for responses (and in any event prior to the publication of the proposals) the council must publish a consultation report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Summarising each of the issues raised by consultees</li> <li>ii) Responding to these by means of clarification, amendment to the proposal or rejection of the concerns, with supporting reasons; and</li> <li>iii) Setting out Estyn’s view (as provided in its consultation response) of the overall merits of the proposal</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>The report will therefore report on all</p>

	<p>comments that have been made and include alternative options that have been presented with the council's appraisal on them provided.</p> <p>Unless cabinet determine otherwise, there will not be a need to undertake a new consultation exercise.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If the planning process for both Cwmffrwdor and Garnteg has already started, surely the decision has already been made?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No decision has yet been made in respect of these proposals. The next stage of the process will be the publication of statutory notice if that is the course of action decided by the council.</li> </ul> <p>If agreed, it will mean that all these proposals can be aligned for implementation at the same time, This will mean that notices could be published for four schools at the same time.</p> <p>In terms of planning for Cwmffrwdor and Garnteg, and in order to achieve the above, some planning and survey work has been required. This has meant that there was a need to commit funding ahead of any decision from Welsh Government to release match funding, in order to keep both these projects on track and on time.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the reasons, the "triggers" behind Victoria Primary School being chosen for closure?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There were a number of criteria that were considered to determine which proposals would go forward and when. The strategic plan was agreed by Council in November 2011 and agreed in principle by Welsh Government in December 2011. The plan as agreed has taken into account a number of criteria including condition of buildings, surplus places and running costs across the schools estate</li> </ul>

## 10 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS/IMPROVEMENTS TO VICTORIA PRIMARY SCHOOL

QUESTION/COMMENT	ANSWER/RESPONSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What evidence is there to support the assertion that the field/adjacent area is too small to site a new school?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building Bulletin (BB) 99 and 103 recommend that the gross area for a 210 place primary school should be on a site of between 2.4 and 2.7 acres.</li> <li>The existing site is made of up 3 separate parcels of land, and a lane runs between these plots which is not owned by the Authority, and provides access to</li> </ul>

	<p>private residential properties. The playing field is approximately 2 acres, while the canteen/demountable classroom site is 0.9 acres. With the main school building covering 1 acre and the public access across the overall site, none of the areas are suitable to develop a new school.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have any options for an upgrade of the existing school been considered?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes, this option was considered in 2010/2011 but was discounted because it does not address the fundamental issue the council has with provision in the north of the county borough, which is the number of smaller schools and the declining population.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the federation of local schools been considered as an option?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federation tends not to produce savings beyond those related to the ability to manage with one less head teacher. This is an area of ongoing discussion with Welsh Government, which could change the funding arrangements for federated schools to make them more practicable and, as a result, worthier of consideration. The ability to merge budgets of federated schools, for example, would be a significant step forward.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An alternative option/proposal has been submitted by the Parents of Victoria Village Community &amp; Governors of Victoria Village Primary School who commissioned Fairhursts Design Group to undertake a preliminary scoping study.</li> </ul> <p>Does this alternative proposal not provide "...an outstanding resource for the whole community...." One of the council's 21<sup>st</sup> Century School's Programme aims and vision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whilst the alternative proposal has some interesting aspects to it, officers have concerns about its likely viability: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i)The capacity of the resultant school would not increase (215). The council would continue to have 3 smaller schools in the area, contrary to the direction for larger schools set out in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme.</li> <li>ii)There is already sufficient alternative nursery provision in the area even with the proposed closure of Brynteg Nursery.</li> <li>iii)Placing a 26 full time equivalent nursery on the playing field would reduce already limited outdoor provision and it may be considered as over-development</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<p>in planning terms.</p> <p>iv)The proposal does not address the issue of the private lane which dissects the site i.e. there will still be a need for learners to cross the lane.</p> <p>v)The suggested level of refurbishment in the main school building appears limited and there is no detail of how additional space will be created in that building (only changes to existing space). Additional work would add to cost.</p> <p>vi)Funding for adult learning has become increasingly difficult, and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. Any new provision in the area would be in competition with existing venues, which would present financial sustainability issues for the existing or new provision, or both.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are other options to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Only close one school and keep the other open</li> <li>ii) Relocate Ysgol Bryn Onnen to the Victoria site</li> <li>iii) There is room for 420 pupils at Victoria if you buy the adjacent builders yard, extend at the front of the school, create a bridged link from the main building over the lane and develop a multi purpose space or even a theatre.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A number of options for the area were considered in 2010/2011 as the Strategic plan was developed. Although these options are noted, it remains the council's view that the proposal as recommended remains the best way forward for the area.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As well as possible federation, and the cost of the alternative option put forward (£3.5M), has the council considered comparative costs for new build as demonstrated by recent projects elsewhere. Three English examples are:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Enfield Heights 175 pupils (cost: £2.6M);</li> <li>ii) Eden Primary 210 pupils (£3.3M)</li> <li>iii) Cobham Primary 210 pupils (£2.5M).</li> </ul> <p>How does this compare with per pupil costs?</p> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The costs for new schools have been market tested locally. This can be demonstrated by the current primary school projects in Torfaen. It is not possible to make meaningful comparisons with the figures given unless there is a detailed breakdown of what costs have been included and which have not e.g. cost of land, legal fees, fit out etc.</li> </ul>
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<b>11 TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS</b>	
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QUESTION/COMMENT	ANSWER/RESPONSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the transitional arrangements?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transition will be supported by a working group consisting of the head teachers, governing body representatives, school/staff representatives and council officers. The purpose of this group will be to identify all of the issues that it will be important to address as part of the change. It is an approach that has worked well with similar proposals in the past.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What steps will be taken to ensure flexibility with enabling friendship groups that have developed at Victoria to be kept together?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The first step to take if it is decided to close Victoria and Brynteg schools will be to establish which primary school parents of children at the school would like to transfer to for September 2017. Once that has been established the transition process will enable staff in the schools involved to look at learners and their friendship groups when planning for the changes ahead.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pupils in particular are concerned about bullying if the proposals are implemented and the children have to attend different settings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is understandable that pupils may feel anxious joining a new school. However all Torfaen schools have anti-bullying policies and work hard to make sure that pupils' voices are heard and addressed through activities such as Anti-bullying Week.</li> </ul> <p>If pupils feel they are being bullied they</p>

	<p>can address the issue through their teacher and Head Teacher. However if parents feel that the issue is not being appropriately dealt with they can of course request a meeting with the Headteacher in the first instance to discuss the matter.</p> <p>It is anticipated that if the proposal is implemented the majority of pupils will attend Garnteg Primary School. It is therefore reassuring to note that the following comments in the recent inspection (May 2015) of Garnteg Primary School highlight the ethos and pastoral support systems that the school has already in place. In the summary of the school's current performance it was stated that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Pupils' wellbeing is outstanding; nearly all pupils enjoy learning, are enthusiastic and are highly motivated to succeed</li> <li>ii) Behaviour in the playground, classrooms and around the school is good.</li> </ul> <p>In addition specific examples promoting well-being and pastoral support can be found throughout the report. Care, support and guidance were judged to be excellent.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you provide more information on transition arrangements?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With any school reorganisation proposal, we recognise that transition will be very important for pupils and indeed staff. We have undertaken a number of school reorganisations recently and the transition plans have been implemented very successfully with little if any disruption.</li> </ul> <p>If the current proposals are approved a transition group will be established which will address any issues to try to allay parental anxieties, build trust and confidence and ensure that pupils transfer in a way which supports their continued learning and wellbeing. Part of the transition arrangements will include a central focus on protecting the interests</p>

	<p>of pupils transferring from smaller school settings to a potentially larger school with new pupils and teachers.</p> <p>Continuous and close working relationships between the staff and governors of the two schools (and others depending on which pupils transfer where) will also be developed in the form of:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Working links between staff</li> <li>ii) Teacher and pupil exchanges</li> <li>iii) Joint school assemblies, trips and educational visits</li> <li>iv) Shared social events</li> <li>v) Wherever possible parental or other co-options into the Governing Body of the receiving school.</li> </ul> <p>A one off uniform clothing grant will be made available for Reception to Year 5 aged pupils of Garnteg Primary School, who at the point of closure transfer to an alternative Primary School. This will be administered by the receiving school to ensure all children receive the appropriate uniform.</p> <p>The authority recognises how important transition will be. As indicated above, a central focus will be protecting the interests of pupils transferring from one school to another with new pupils and teachers. With the potential of some teaching staff transferring with pupils to the new setting support will be available to meet individual children's needs where required.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What about transitional arrangements between Primary and secondary (Abersychan)</li> </ul>	<p>As the schools affected by these proposals are all partner schools to and in the cluster of Abersychan Secondary School transitional arrangements should not be impacted if the proposals proceed.</p>
<b>12 IMPACT ON WIDER COMMUNITY</b>	
<b>QUESTION/COMMENT</b>	<b>ANSWER/RESPONSE</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will the Equality Impact Assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes, included in the consultation</li> </ul>

<p>be made readily available to parents?</p>	<p>document.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This will result in the break-up of the community; Victoria will lose its heritage; The school has served multiple generations of families.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The council does not dispute that the school has served multiple generations of families, but the community will still be there and there is no reason we can see that it should not be possible for the local community to galvanise around the alternative arrangements for education in this part of the county borough given the relative proximity of the schools. Access to community groups etc after school and in the holiday period could still be provided locally if the demand is there.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From a resident's perspective living by Garnteg School there is already traffic congestion around the school. This proposal will make it worse. Have you considered the needs of the elderly?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parking concerns and traffic congestion outside schools at the start and end of the day are acknowledged by the Council. This is an issue that is unfortunately experienced at the majority, if not all schools in Torfaen and further afield. We have carried out a Traffic Impact Assessment (TIA) at Garnteg as part of the planning process to identify traffic and pedestrian movements and consider what improvements are necessary to accommodate the additional school places.</li> </ul> <p>The Authority will wherever possible ensure there are "safe walking routes in the community" to help encourage less car use and if possible make the prospect of walking, particularly to school safer and a more attractive option than driving. The council has recently secured significant Welsh Government funding to improve walking routes in the Abersychan area to support this.</p> <p>The council will also work with the schools on their Travel Plans and try to encourage less use of vehicles. Welsh Government policy remains not to encourage driving and transport movement around schools.</p> <p>The Safety of all the community is paramount.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposal as it stands fails to tackle poverty issues in the area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any Pupil Deprivation Grant available will be pass-ported straight to Cwmffrwdroer</li> </ul>

	<p>and Garnteg or other receiving schools, which will mean no difference made to provision or entitlement to that provision.</p> <p>In addition a new uniform will be provided to pupils at the point of closure and there will also be home to school transport provided to those eligible pupils in accordance with current policy.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is a concern that the council are happy and content to put our children in an environment that is a “Flying Start” area and one that suffers as a result of deprivation, poverty, disadvantage and high levels of unemployment. The council should have a duty and be aiming to maximise the full potential of this area and concentrate on increasing the life opportunities of the children who are already attending Garnteg Primary School.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>‘The school’s high level of pastoral and academic support means that, by the time that most pupils leave the school, they have valuable literacy and numeracy skills and are confident independent learners. The school is particularly successful in ensuring that its most vulnerable pupils make good and often very good progress and attain well’. (Extract from the Estyn inspection report on Garnteg Primary School, May 2015.)</li> </ul>
<b>13 IMPACT ON WELSH LANGUAGE PROVISION</b>	
<b>QUESTION/COMMENT</b>	<b>ANSWER/RESPONSE</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What will be the impact on Welsh language? Can it be confirmed that there will be no expected increase in applications to Ysgol Bryn Onnen?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The proposals are not expected to have a significant impact on the demand for Welsh Medium education. Nonetheless, the authority has a statutory duty to provide Welsh Medium education where it is requested. Applications to Ysgol Bryn Onnen will be a matter of parental preference, which will determine demand for places. Parents/carers seeking a Welsh Medium primary school setting will be provided for at that setting or one of the others settings in Torfaen.</li> </ul>
<b>14 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS</b>	
<b>QUESTION/COMMENT</b>	<b>ANSWER/RESPONSE</b>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does Torfaen propose to do during the consultation to further consider, the needs of pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN)?</li> </ul> <p>Once considered, will the proposed actions be published?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) in these schools will have their individual needs met within a mainstream setting. Schools will be constantly assessing and reviewing the progress of pupils who they have identified as having additional educational needs. If any additional support is required they will seek the support of their ALN Link Officer or other members of the ALN team at Torfaen CBC as outlined in the ALN policy and handbook. Brynteg and Victoria schools do not have Special Need Resource Bases attached to them in addition to mainstream provision.</li> </ul>
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### 15 EARLY YEARS PROVISION

QUESTION/COMMENT	ANSWER/RESPONSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will the Early Years provision of additional nursery places as proposed for Cwmffrwdoer undermine registered private/voluntary early years settings in the area?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposal if agreed would see a 26 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) nursery for 4 year olds and “rising 3’s” established at Cwmffrwdoer. It is the view of the council that it would not significantly undermine any such existing provision in the area.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should the proposal proceed, will there be an opportunity for Cwmffrwdoer Under 5’s to move back into the refurbished and extended Cwmffrwdoer Primary School and offer childcare?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This will be a decision for the school and its governing body as was the case when the Cwmffrwdoer Under 5’s previously occupied accommodation in the school.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was there any consideration given to other providers when the age range increase for Cwmffrwdoer was considered?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes. The council maintains a mix of private, voluntary, independent and council run providers and takes into consideration data from the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment which indicated that the net impact of the proposals for Cwmffrwdoer and Garnteg would be relatively neutral.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The removal of Brynteg Nursery will reduce provision and have a detrimental impact on the ability of parents/carers to return to work if they so wish.</li> </ul> <p>There will be insufficient provision in</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the proposed addition of a further 52 part time equivalent places along with existing provision in the council maintained and registered private/voluntary early years settings, the council, having reviewed the timing of these proposals is confident that there</li> </ul>

the area.	<p>will be sufficient places to meet current and forecast demand.</p> <p>The opening of the nursery on the Cwmffrwdoer Primary School site will increase the number of childcare wraparound places in the area and could encourage more parents back to work.</p>
<b>16 CWMFFDRWDOER PRIMARY SCHOOL</b>	
<b>QUESTION/COMMENT</b>	<b>ANSWER/RESPONSE</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With regard to Cwmffrwdoer Primary school, who carried out the topographical study and when will it be published?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The study was carried out by Parsons Brinckerhoff and published in October 2015.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has an independent Drainage engineer been commissioned to assess the level of risk at Cwmffrwdoer with regard to future potential flooding, and is Torfaen in a position to deal with the consequences of a further flooding incident?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The school is not in a flood zone. A drainage survey has been carried out and no significant issues have been identified.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has planning been sought for the extensions and improved parking provision at Cwmffrwdoer?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planning approval is being sought, as part of the overall development for Cwmffrwdoer Primary School.</li> </ul>
<b>17 SURPLUS PLACES</b>	
<b>QUESTION/COMMENT</b>	<b>ANSWER/RESPONSE</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there any surplus places in Victoria school?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are no surplus places in Victoria School at present, but surplus places are projected in north Torfaen over the next few years as a whole due to changes in population, as detailed in the consultation document.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can a reduction in surplus places be achieved in ways other than closing a school?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools amalgamations and removal of redundant buildings/demountable classrooms are other ways to reduce surplus places. Neither is considered an appropriate alternative in this instance where we have already three smaller sized schools.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can it be explained how an increase in surplus places in the short term, and continued surplus places fit into a policy of reducing surplus places?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The council's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme is a strategic approach to managing the challenges of surplus places and the need for investment in the school estate. These proposals contribute to the overall delivery of that approach, and will ensure amongst other things that we are meeting Welsh Government's target for surplus places, which is to have no more than 10%.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can it be confirmed that the needs of working parents/carers will be considered in the issue of surplus places?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is not possible to answer this question without knowing what needs are being referred to.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The reduction of surplus places inevitably leaves the Authority with less flexibility to accommodate special circumstances in its admission policy. What is the target for surplus places, the current level in the area and what is the target?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welsh Government target is for no more than 10%. It is accepted that reducing the number of schools ultimately reduces parental preference in where they send their children. Whilst guarantees can never be given (particularly given infant class size legislation), it is anticipated however that sufficient places will be provided for the expected in-catchment demand. The published admission criteria gives a higher priority for certain groups of children, those living in catchment and those with siblings already attending school.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the authority recognise the tension between the need to cut surplus places and the desire amongst parents for flexibility?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes. It is a tension replicated across Wales as more and more surplus places are removed by councils, but removal of surplus places is a key priority nationally and locally.</li> </ul>
<b>18 STAFFING MATTERS</b>	
<b>QUESTION/COMMENT</b>	<b>ANSWER/RESPONSE</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Authority staff are already talking to teachers and other school based staff about seeking alternative employment, yet you say no decision has been made!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the consultation meetings with staff it was agreed that although no decisions had yet been made, preliminary discussions would be offered to look at individual circumstances. Staff wellbeing is paramount with the "care first" support line available, HR support in groups or 1:1's and trade union representation provided where required.</li> </ul>

## **4. ESTYN RESPONSE**

The report received during the consultation period, and based on the consultation document is provided below in its entirety.

### **Estyn's response to Torfaen County Borough Council's proposals to discontinue Victoria Primary and Abersychan Brynteg Nursery Schools.**

### **Estyn's response to the proposal to discontinue Abersychan Brynteg Nursery and Victoria Primary Schools and extend the provision at Cwmffrwdroer and Garnteg Primary Schools.**

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.

#### **Introduction**

The consultation proposal is from Torfaen County Borough Council. The proposal is to close Abersychan Brynteg Nursery and Victoria Primary and Schools. Torfaen County Borough Council is proposing to expand Cwmffrwdroer Primary School from its current capacity of 210 to 315 places and add provision for 52 part-time Nursery-aged pupils. At the same time, it proposes to expand Garnteg Primary School from its current capacity of 248 to 420 places. The proposer indicates that this new provision will be available from September 2017.

#### **Summary/Conclusion**

It is Estyn's opinion that the proposal is likely to at least maintain the current standards of education and provision in the area. The proposal is unlikely to have a negative impact on any other schools or education provider in the area.

#### **Description and benefits**

The proposal contains an appropriate rationale and clearly defines the expected benefits. These include the more efficient use of available school places and financial resources whilst maintaining the current standards of provision for education in the area. The proposal also highlights appropriately the potential benefits that a larger school will have on the overall quality of provision.

The proposer has compared the benefits of the proposal with the status quo and has considered all other reasonable options fairly. Overall, Estyn agrees that the proposer's preferred option, option five, is the most suitable. This is because the

buildings on these sites have more potential for development and these sites are likely to be more accessible for the communities they serve. This option also pays appropriate attention to issues of surplus places. The proposed arrangements are likely to reduce the number of surplus places over time.

The proposal demonstrates likely financial savings, for example by not paying for the backlog of required maintenance at Abersychan Brynteg Nursery and Victoria Primary School.

The proposer identifies fairly that there are many potential risks associated with the proposal, for example the risk that all required building work may not be completed on schedule. The proposer identifies a suitable range of strategies to minimise most of these risks as far as is possible at this stage. However, a few evaluations of risk are limited. These include the evaluation of likely traffic issues at the extended sites. At this stage information about other methods of travel to the new sites for pupils is also limited, for instance there is little information about safe walking routes for pupils and their families. The proposal clarifies the local authority's position on providing transport to school for pupils from Reception class age onwards.

Estyn considers that the proposer has carried out a fair community impact assessment. This assessment suggests that there will be very little, if any negative impact on community services.

The proposal pays limited attention to the implications for staff and governors at the discontinued schools. It identifies that there will be savings from the discontinued schools, for example through leadership salaries and that there will be increased revenue costs. However, the proposal does not clarify what these estimated costs will pay for, for example teachers' salaries. The proposal refers to increased opportunities for distributive leadership at the extended schools but does not clarify what this means or what difference this will make.

The proposal is thorough in its use of data with regard to past, present and future pupil numbers in all schools affected by this re-organisation. It demonstrates that the proposal would reduce surplus places and reduce them to meet Welsh Government targets. The proposal is not likely to have a negative impact on Welsh medium education.

The local authority identifies that the proposed arrangements are likely to improve the accessibility to education provision for pupils and other users with disabilities. The proposal suggests that the planned changes will provide more inclusive settings for pupils with any special educational needs or disabilities. However, it does not provide any detail regarding this provision or its likely impact on outcomes for pupils. It is Estyn's opinion, that the proposal is unlikely to have a detrimental effect on provision for these pupils. The impact assessment refers appropriately to the potential impact of this proposal on vulnerable groups.

Overall, the local authority has shown that it has presented a considerable amount of relevant data regarding the current standards of leadership, for example via school categorisation information, and of the outcomes for pupils in end of key stage teacher assessments. This information is evident in the benchmarking tables within the proposal. However, the proposer does not make clear judgements about the

likely impact of the proposal on the quality of leadership, provision or standards. Based on the trends of performance over time and the most up-to-date information, Estyn believes that the standards of leadership and provision at Garnteg Primary School are likely to maintain or improve the outcomes for pupils. The proposed arrangements are not likely to affect outcomes for pupils transferring to Cwmffrwdor Primary School significantly.

The proposal states that there will be no changes to the admission arrangements for the schools included in the proposal. Overall, it is Estyn's opinion that impact of revised admission arrangements will lead to very little disruption to pupils' learning. The proposal identifies the support that pupils and their families will receive to transfer from the discontinued schools to the extended schools appropriately. The proposal contains a suitable evaluation of the implications for pre-school educational providers in the locality.

### **Local Authority response to Estyn comments**

There is an expectation that proposals must result in standards of provision and education outcomes at least equal to if not better than the existing arrangements. It is therefore noteworthy that in Estyn's opinion the proposal is likely to at least maintain the current standards of education and provision in the area and is unlikely to have a negative impact on any other schools or education provider in the area.

## **5. CONSULTATION WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

Torfaen Play and Short Break Services were contacted to carry out consultation with pupils in both Victoria Primary and Abersychan Brynteg Nursery Schools.

Attached at appendix 3 is that Service's report (in its entirety) which details the outcomes of the consultation with the children of these two schools.

## **6. CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED DURING THE CONSULTATION PERIOD**

A request was received to publish every consultation response in respect of these particular school closure proposals. The council will, in this instance and given current resources, make available an electronic copy of the responses received (personal information having been removed) after the consultation closed.

The file of redacted information can be found on the following link:

<http://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/EducationLearning/21st-Century-Learning/Latest-News.aspx>

## Appendix 1

### Distribution List for the Consultation Document and Consultation Report

- The Governing body of each school maintained by Torfaen LEA
- The Headteacher of each school maintained by Torfaen LEA
- The Diocesan Director of Education of the Roman Catholic Church
- The Diocesan Director of Education of the Church in Wales
- Awdurdod Cynwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru (the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales)
- The Welsh Joint Education Committee
- The Welsh Language Commissioner
- The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
- Welsh Government (Welsh Ministers)
- ESTYN
- Pan - Gwent Chief Education Officers (Caerphilly, Newport, Monmouthshire, Blaenau Gwent, to distribute to schools in their areas as appropriate)
- The Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership
- Children & Young People's Partnership
- Coleg Gwent
- The Careers Service
- Torfaen Association of school Governors
- Libraries; (Blaenavon, Cwmbran and Pontypool)
- Other Directorates of Torfaen County Borough Council
- Schools Library Service
- Blaenavon Community Council
- Cwmbran Community Council
- Pontypool Community Council
- Ponthir Community Council

- Henllys Community Council
- Croesyceiliog and Llanyrafon Community Council
- Welsh Government(Schools Management and Effectiveness Division)
- All relevant Professional Associations(NUT; NASUWT; ATL; UCAC; UNISON; GMB)
- Local AM – Lynne Neagle
- Local MP – Nick Thomas-Symonds
- Other AMs and MPs representing the area served by/intended to be served by any school which is the subject of the proposals.
- All Elected Members of Torfaen County Borough Council
- Parents/Carers of all pupils affected by the proposals
- RhAG (Parents for Welsh Medium Education)
- Registered Private/Voluntary Early Years Settings/Providers in Torfaen
- Torfaen Voluntary Alliance; Communities First Partnership Board
- CYDAG (Cwmdeithas Ysgolion Dros Addysg Gymraeg); Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin
- Education Achievement Service (EAS)
- The relevant Regional Transport Consortium
- The Police and Crime Commissioner for the area
- The relevant Health Authority(Aneurin Bevan Health Board)

## Appendix 2

### Summary of responses received during the consultation period

The following have responded to the consultation:

- Parents of Victoria Village Committee & Governors of Victoria Village Primary School
- 96 Letters/e mails
- 27 letters from Pupils in Victoria Primary School
- Pupils from Victoria Primary and Abersychan Brynteg Nursery Schools
- Estyn.
- Pontypool Community Council
- Mr N Thomas - Symonds, Member of Parliament for Torfaen
- Mrs Lynne Neagle, Assembly Member for Torfaen
- Abersychan Ward Members (Councillors Gwyneira Clark, Giles Davies and Wayne Tomlinson)
- 1 interested party commented via the council's on line consultation tool, "My Say".
- 2 comments were received on the "Call Torfaen" e mail account and forwarded to Education.
- Petition signed by 1424 persons who, "object to the proposed closure of Victoria Primary School, Abersychan. Furthermore we do not support the proposal for the children of our community to attend a larger school on either the Garnteg site or any other site outside of the community". The petition was received on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2015. At the time of the submission of this petition it is also noted that a further 587 had signed an on-line petition, giving a total of over 2000.

## **Appendix 3**

### **Results of consultation with pupils**

#### **Introduction**

We were requested by the Education Department to consult with both Victoria Village Primary and Brynteg Nursery School in relation to proposed school closures. This was part of the wider 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools program.

The workshops provided children and young people with the opportunity to put their views and opinions across. It was stated clearly within the workshops that all the information gathered from the children would be handed over to the Education Department.

Great emphasis was placed on ensuring that every pupil had the opportunity to state how they feel.

#### **Methodology**

The methods used to gather the information included games, group discussions as well as opinion boxes. It was felt that this was the best method to gauge information from the children.

Within the workshop at Brynteg Nursery School we had to really scale down the questions due to the age range and capability and general understanding of the pupils.

At the beginning of each workshop we explained our role and indeed the purpose of the workshop. We started off each workshop with a couple of ice breaker games to ensure the pupils felt at ease and comfortable to participate in the workshop.

All the views and concerns of the pupils have been captured within the next section.

**Date: Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2015**

<b>Victoria Village Primary</b>	<b>22 pupils</b>
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**1. If you have to go to a new school, will you be worried about making new friends?**

<b>Happy:</b>	1
<b>Not Happy</b>	21
<b>Not Sure:</b>	0

**Comments:**

- *It might affect peoples grades*
- *They might teach differently*
- *Not worried*
- *Sometimes you might miss your old friends*
- *I like the friends I got now*
- *Could be bullied*
- *I like my friends at Victoria*
- *When you move to a new school you might be frightened so people will avoid you*
- *If I got lost in the new school, someone that's meant to help might not be very nice.*
- *I don't want to move because I want to concentrate on going to comp*
- *There might not be any breakfast clubs or afterschool clubs*
- *It doesn't matter because I have friends outside of school*
- *If the school gets knocked down there will be no more history for all the families that went to the school*
- *Victoria has been standing for over 100 years*

**2. If you have to go to a new school, would you be worried about different teachers?**

<b>yes</b>	4
<b>no</b>	18

**Comments:**

- *The teachers could be nice*
- *You will get to know them*
- *They might let you draw after work*
- *They may teach us better*
- *They might teach us the same*
- *The teachers may tell you off*
- *They might let you do less work*
- *They might not be nice to you*
- *If the classes are too big they may not hear you when you are trying to talk*
- *You might get treated differently*
- *You may do something wrong by accident because the rules are different*
- *The teachers at Victoria know what the kids are like whereas if they go to another school the teachers won't know them*
- *The teachers might not respect your work*
- *I want to stay with my old teachers*

**3. If you have to go to a new school, how do you feel about wearing a different uniform?**

<b>Happy:</b>	8
<b>Not Happy:</b>	13
<b>Not Sure</b>	1

**Comments:**

- *We like the one we got*
- *I wouldn't mind changing the uniform but it feels like they are trying to change me*
- *There are football kits so I don't mind*

**4. What worries you the most about going to a new school?**

**Comments:**

- *Teachers*
- *We may have to repeat work we have already done*
- *We might have to go in to head teachers office*
- *There might be an unkind teacher*
- *Being bullied and making new friends*
- *Cwmffrwdroer has a sink hole so it might be dangerous*
- *We might get lost*
- *I will miss my brother*
- *I might be split up form my friendship group*
- *There might be no school plays*
- *Out of catchment area*
- *Could get more bullies*
- *Might be wasting money on petrol*
- *Extension is humungous in Garnteg*

**5. We would like to help you in the proposed move to a new school. If you have to go to a new school, which of the following do you think is a good idea to help you?**

<b>Play Day:</b>	4
<b>Sports Day:</b>	5
<b>School visit:</b>	10
<b>Other</b>	2

**Other:**

- Party
- Taekwondo

**School visit:**

- Meet teachers
- Show the new school
- Learn the new methods of teaching
- See if you like the school if not you can go and have a look at another one
- See if they are nice

- See what the classes are like

**Sports Day:**

- Keeps you fit

**Play Day:**

- We can make new friends through playing

**6. Is there any additional information/comments that you would like us to feedback to Education on your behalf?**

- *The school is like a part-time home, would you really want to take it from us?*
- *It may be too far to walk to the new school*
- *The school has a good reputation, why close it?*
- *Friends might not want to go to the same school*
- *There will be more car fumes if people have to drive further*
- *Too much work for my mum and grandma*
- *We will miss all our memories but we will make new ones*
- *If there was a place to review this, I would put a bad review*
- *It might be hard for parents that are working*
- *Teachers might lose their jobs*
- *Why are they knocking the school down, it won't help the environment and what is going to be here?*

**Date: Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2015**

**Abersychan Brynteg Nursey**

**9 Pupils**

**1. If this nursery was to close, how would this make you feel?**

Happy	1
Sad	8

**2. Would anybody like to tell us how they would feel if this nursery was to close down?**

- "I would feel sad because I would miss the teachers"
- "I would feel happy, because I do"
- "I would feel sad because I would miss it as I love playing with my friends"
- "I would feel sad as I would miss playing with my toys"
- "I would be happy as my mum would cwch me"
- "I would be sad as mummy goes to work"
- "I would be sad because I would"

## **Appendix 4**

**Notes of consultation meetings with Staff, Governors, Parents/Carers & Other Interested Parties in respect of proposals to close Abersychan Brynteg Nursery and Victoria Primary Schools.**

### **Staff meeting held at Victoria Primary School on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2015 at 3.30pm**

Present:

County Councillor David Yeowell, Executive Member for Education  
Dermot McChrystal, John Tushingham, Granville Hern and Mark Horton – Torfaen  
CBC Education Service  
18 Staff.

#### **Welcome and Introductions**

DM welcomed everyone to the meeting, and officers introduced themselves to those present.

A short introduction was provided outlining the key messages in relation to this specific proposal. It was explained that this was at the consultation stage and no final decisions had been made.

Questions and comments were then invited from the School staff.

#### **Questions and Answers**

Comment: What evidence is there of this school being “not fit for purpose” in 2010? Is there another survey? If its still unfit why not close us straightaway?

In response: EC Harris were appointed by Welsh Government to undertake surveys on all Torfaen Schools. The survey results were made available in 2010/11 and considered condition, sufficiency and suitability. Overall Victoria, was condition C which is not good, but not the worst. The suitability element of the survey picked up the public lane and DDA compliancy. Sufficiency relates to small schools and there is no great scope to expand on the current site. This is not therefore based on just one factor, and this information helps to inform a solution for the North of the borough.

Comment: How many children are disabled in the North of the borough? How many schools are compliant?

In response: Where possible we make adaptations to accommodate a child with a disability but it is not always possible. We are required to make reasonable adjustments.

Comment: Small schools are below 200 pupils, that's a Welsh Government guide. You said we are a small school but we have over 200 pupils.

In response: We are referring to "smaller" schools here.

Comment: What would be needed to be DDA compliant here? Is there a report? There have been changes here since 2010.

In response: We will always look at the needs of individual learners, and particularly the physical aspects, but it would be very expensive to retrofit.

Comment: I am a teacher and parent who has a disabled child here. At Cwmffrwdroer and Garnteg the roads are dangerous to get to school.

In Response: The council is developing schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and where new build schools are involved facilities will be built in. Reasonable adjustments will be made where possible in existing schools so requirements can be resolved in different ways. We can't look at every individual circumstance, but look at general description of each school's facilities.

Comment: We need to use up to date survey. You wouldn't buy a house based on an old survey.

In response: The surveys were correct at the time and are reviewed by professionals each year. Yes it is 4 years old, but the annual reviews have not shown anything significantly different. There are systems in place to know of any issues.

Comment: This is an amalgamation on the Garnteg site, with two schools closing. Where was the consultation?

In response: A number of options have been considered and are in the frame for consultation.

Comment: The text in the Garnteg document is different. Is there a change in policy?

In response: We will look at that, but option 3 is the preferred option moving forward. It is still a proposal. The recommendation from Cabinet was to consult, no decisions have been made, The option will be tested in this consultation phase. The proposal remains that this school will close, with others expanded. If a different option comes forward it will be considered.

Comment: This has changed since June. Why? There is no integrity.

In response: The proposal that Victoria will close has been in the public domain since November 2011. If the Welsh Government funding is not available, it is back to the drawing board.

Comment: So if Victoria stays open what happens to the money?

In response: Some money has been spent at risk. We must plan ahead, but until permission is approved to proceed, building won't go forward. The total cost is £8M of which 50% is the council. If the decision is not to proceed we will need to go back to look at the 21<sup>st</sup> Century programme as there is no contingency.

Comment: What happens to the staff?

In response: There is no 100% guarantee of redeployment, but we will explore all opportunities. The council has a good record of redeployment. Last year was a pinch point in terms of school rationalisation, but all teaching staff were found alternative employment, but not all teaching assistants. Staff wellbeing is paramount with the "care first" support line available, HR support in groups or 1:1's and trade union representation where required.

Comment: Will you look to upskill staff?

In response: Yes, we will look at all the options.

Comment: If 30 pupils go will one teacher follow?

In response: We will meet with head teachers of other schools. All schools are signed up to the protocol ("staffing compact"). Our hope would be that all teachers who want to stay on can.

Comment: Is there a danger that permanent staff will only get temporary posts e.g. maternity cover.

In response: It is a question of reasonableness, but any redundancies would be deferred on that basis. If any posts are available it is for the individual to consider. More detail can be provided on circumstances in an individual 1:1.

Comment: We've considered addressing the maintenance here, by looking at a loan but can't go forward because of the uncertainty.

In response: Maintenance should continue regardless of any uncertainty in relation to health & safety matters and reasonable adjustments for DDA.

Comment: In terms of "fit for purpose" why is Cwmffrwdroer better than here? It has had floods, there are mine workings etc. That's too expensive to put right.

In response: We have to be careful how "fit for purpose" is interpreted. There are no mine workings here or at Garnteg, but Cwmffrwdroer yes. The membrane on what the school sits is sound, and the professional advice is that it is safe to do what is proposed. It is not especially expensive and can be achieved within the overall cost envelope of the project.

Comment: Surplus places. There are none here and Garnteg is full too. Why not look at schools further down the valley?

In response: We have reviewed surplus places on a cluster basis, and the population across the area. Numbers continue to fall, and against that backdrop the

expectation from Welsh Government is that we have to achieve and maintain reductions to surplus places.

Comment: Why not spend money on schools that are full and popular?

In response: We are looking at this strategically, and that includes schools in the south of the borough as well. There remain population shifts and the Welsh Government target is 10% surplus places. Proposals overall help achieve that figure, but at the same time retain sufficient capacity in the area and maintain an element for parental preference. The hope is that children would attend their local school. There has been choice because of the level of surplus places. That choice will be reduced as surplus places are removed.

Comment: Have the changes at Blaenavon and Cwmbran High schools been successful for the staff involved. What about the pupils?

In response: In terms of staff, the schools would be best placed to answer that. For pupils, the reports from Cwmbran High are that they have had a really good start. At Blaenavon the outcomes are good. Where reference is made to “super” schools it is not the size that is important, but the outcomes and what happens in these schools. We are clear in where we want to be.

Comment: If pupils leave, what will happen to us?

In Response: The council will keep the core staffing in place wherever possible. There could be concerns from September 2016, dependant on any decisions, but we will continue to work closely with the school in terms of pupil numbers and budget but the commitment remains to support the school throughout this process.

Comment: Where would you send your children to school? Here or Blaenavon for example with over 400 pupils?

In response: That would be up to parents here and elsewhere. Their views are important. If you have any different proposals please send them in to us to consider.

Close: 4.30pm

### **Governing Body meeting held at Victoria Primary School on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2015 at 4.45pm**

Present:

County Councillor David Yeowell, Executive Member for Education  
Dermot McChrystal, John Tushingham, Granville Hern and Mark Horton – Torfaen  
CBC Education Service  
9 Governors.

Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, and made introductions.

A statement was read by the Chair to explain the governing body's position in relation to the proposal to close the school. Governors reminded officers that they had received notice from Estyn that given the pace of change the school had been removed from monitoring visits.

It was noted that the Head of Education had a statutory role to ensure all governing bodies were compliant to the law. There had been some initial concern with the role of the governing body in relation to consultation with children as part of this process, but this had now been resolved and that consultation would now proceed next week.

Questions and comments were then invited.

### Questions and Answers

Comment: Given the position of the Governing Body can we oppose the proposed closure of Victoria Primary School?

In response: We wouldn't expect anything less, whilst you are supporting the views of the school and its community. There was a concern, but this has now been resolved.

Comment: We want to make the consultation as transparent and complete as possible.

In response: We fully understand the position. People are very passionate about the school.

Comment: Has the school considered Federation/different management structure (Shared Head teacher and Deputy for example). This could offer savings to the council.

In response: The Federation regulations as they stand wouldn't necessarily generate savings. Both Governing bodies would need to agree to the process which would be competitive in terms of appointments.

Comment: Why not amalgamate then?

In response: All the options were considered in 2010 in order to meet the expected demand for places. There have been some amalgamations/"soft" federations most recently where two secondary schools (Fairwater High and Llantarnam) closed and one was opened in its place. Here there are 3 smaller schools, which are not sustainable and closure is what we are now consulting on.

Comment: So if these options were discounted earlier, are the documents/business case/SWAT analysis to support it available?

In response: Yes, they are. E C Harris in 2010 carried out a survey of all schools in relation to their condition, suitability and sustainability. This was used in the report to Council in November 2011 with all the options.

Comment: I have a document in relation to the buildings that covers a 10 year period from 2007 to 2017. Has this now been superseded?

In response: If you can reference the document we will be happy to check.

Comment: Could an option be to close two schools but open one here?

In response: The site is not suitable here to develop a 420 place school. All the options were looked at in 2011 and we are not aware of any suitable sites in this area.

Comment: Cwmffrwdoer is in the wrong place so why are you suggesting children go there?

In response: We cannot stop parents expressing a preference to go where they want to go, but some may choose to go there. If the proposal was to proceed this catchment area would fall into that of Garnteg Primary school.

Comment: What about the “out of catchment” children attending Victoria now. Where do they go if the school closes?

In response: We can give an absolute commitment that if parents want to send their children to Garnteg who are in attendance here at the point of closure, then that will happen. Projections are showing the population in the North will continue to fall and we are confident that there will be sufficient capacity in the area.

Comment: If all children were to go to Garnteg, there would remain a surplus at Cwmffrwdoer.

In response: Surplus capacity is being reduced across the borough, but we will maintain a 10% surplus. This is in line with targets set by Welsh Government.

Comment: You are removing parental preference/choice?

In response: The removal of surplus capacity will clearly reduce choice, but each surplus place has a cost, hence the target to reduce to 10%.

Comment: What about faith schools or home tuition?

In response: In terms of faith schools, the Governing body are the admissions authority and parents/carers apply directly to the school for places. For home tuition, there is clear guidance on the Torfaen CBC website (ALN – Additional Learning Needs).

Comment: There will still be surplus places if parents choose home tuition or faith schools.

In response: We do not anticipate a massive shift to this so do not expect it to be a significant issue.

Comment: You mention 7 closures before does that send a message to us about this process?

In response: We are still at the consultation stage and no decision has been made on the proposal. A report will go to Cabinet. The Education Service will present a report with its proposals and recommendations. If the motion is carried forward it could go to the Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee There is an opportunity for “call in”, when a member formally objects. This means the cabinet members withdraw from the meeting and the rest of council take a vote. There is a robust scrutiny process. It is not rubber stamped by cabinet or is it a forgone conclusion.

Comment: Is this the best value business case? What are the options?

In response: We think this is the best option moving forward, but that is why we are here, to listen to your views and report back.

Comment: Are you looking into or considering future needs? It would appear that the Victoria/Garnteg option was chosen first and for no reason.

In response: This has not been a simple process. We are still in Band A of the strategic plan and it is a long process involved in changing the estate. Timings and the decision making process are complex to get to the next phase, but we will continue to keep the whole programme under review.

Comment: Is there any leverage in terms of rebalancing of capacity/sufficiency?

In response: The policy remains that where it is feasible to move to 420 place schools. The numbers balance in the area here, but 3 schools as they are is not in our view the way forward. Two sites with two larger schools will be more efficient.

Comment: Can you (Councillor Yeowell) bring your fellow councillors into this school to see how it functions now?

In response: I haven't got any influence. If they visit that is their prerogative. It is very clear that the community are acting together and that is commendable. If the proposal does go ahead it will only do so once all the checks and balances are done. If it progresses it must be hoped that the spirit expressed here could be transferred to another school if that is the decision.

Comment: I'm not local and have a Year 6 child so in the long term it won't affect my family, but looking in from the outside this is a real community. Abersychan has nothing else other than its schools and I do feel passionately now, as bringing my child here has created that sense of community. It is a heritage issue as well as so little of it is left.

Comment: Why close Victoria, it is fit for purpose.

In response: It is not just about being fit for purpose. It's a balance of lots of different issues: Population changes; buildings; revenue costs; maintenance issues.

Comment: If we were to address the maintenance issues would that change?

In response: It is not just about maintenance. It used to be done on an annual basis with grants from Welsh Government (SBIG – School Building Improvement Grant), but this was not strategic investment. We have to look at this longer term (20 -25 years). E C Harris undertook surveys on behalf of Welsh Government and Victoria was assessed as a condition C school (A being good; D worse). We have to look at suitability into the future and this was assessed quite poorly and cannot be easily developed or expanded.

Comment: What happens to the site?

In response: If the proposal proceeds the site will be deemed surplus to educational requirements and offered up to other council departments. If not the site will be sold, and the capital receipts will be re invested into the capital programme for education.

Comment: Did you consult Cwmffrwdoer and Garnteg about this?

In response: .That consultation was about the possibility of expansion. No development can take place until a decision has been made in respect of Victoria and Brynteg. The cabinet report in January 2016 will consider the next steps. There is a process to follow and we are working on it now as the consultation develops.

Comment: I've been through this process before, and we lost staff. What will happen here? Will we possibly end up with a skeleton staff?

In response: Parental preference will determine where pupils go as the process develops, but we will work closely with the school, governing body, Education Achievement Service (EAS) to ensure the quality of teaching and learning is maintained, whatever the outcome.

Comment: Will you second people or use supply staff? What is the long term plan?

In response: We will do whatever we can to ensure continuity. We want to maintain a stable solution bearing in mind that we are talking about individual members of staff.

Comment: You have provided a very general response in terms of the impact on Torfaen's carbon footprint. More specific details are needed;

In response: We will provide more information if it is available, but you will need to elaborate.

MEETING CLOSED AT 5.45pm

**Parents/Other Interested Parties meeting held at Victoria Primary School on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2015 at 6.00pm**

Present:

County Councillor David Yeowell, Executive Member for Education

Dermot McChrystal, John Tushingham and Mark Horton – Torfaen CBC Education Service  
38 Parents/Carers and Other Interested Parties.

### Welcome and Introductions

The Chair of Governors welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introduced the officers present.

A short introduction was provided outlining the key messages in relation to this specific proposal and its relation to the overall 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme for Torfaen. It was explained that this was at the consultation stage and no final decisions had been made.

Questions and comments were then invited from the audience.

### Questions and Answers

Comment: You wrote to the school in the summer and said there were no plans to close, yet here we are now talking about just that. This is a breach of public trust and misleading the community.

In response: That was the case at that point, there was no plan agreed

Comment: You applied for funding during that period, creating more places and surplus, with risk of claw back. What was trigger?

In response: The issue was when to start consultation. This meeting would not be taking place if Welsh Government had not given the okay to funding. We would have been criticised, and quite rightly, if we brought forward proposals without funding.

We reported that the programme was in 4 bands, with Band A being undertaken between 2014 and 2019. All the proposals within the overall Programme went to Welsh Government. Welsh Government then asked councils to reconsider proposals and focus on worst buildings in Band A, and this is what we are doing. The reduction of surplus places is across all of the school estate on a strategic basis.

Comment: Under Freedom of Information we have seen how much surplus there is in each school. At Victoria you are 2 places short!

In response: Yes, there are no surplus places here at the moment. But, we have clearly stated, and it has been in the public domain since 2011, that the proposal as it affects Victoria and Garnteg is in Band A to be determined by 2019. The proposal will support the strategy to reduce surplus places across the borough. It is not just in the North - proposals have been focussed in the South of the borough too with 3 new primary schools and the reorganisation of both primary and secondary school provision.

Comment: Why not close Cwmffrwdroer instead of Victoria? You can't say what the trigger was for this school, but state it's not fit for purpose. Is it just about the money?

In response: It's predominantly about suitability. E C Harris was commissioned by Welsh Government to undertake a survey of all Torfaen schools. In terms of Victoria, the site has some constraints and the lane means the development of a new school here can't be done. In terms of the survey, Victoria is a grade C (A being good; D poor). Investment in schools across Wales was in the past insufficient and maintenance suffered as a result. Previously it was grant driven and short term. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century schools programme takes a longer term view, and we have banded proposals because we are thinking about all our schools and looking ahead to the future.

Comment: You are hiding behind data sets. Hidden under different levels?

In response: If you can put forward an alternative option it will be considered as part of the consultation process.

Comment: The primary objective is to provide the best facilities for our children and the best outcomes. You want to close the 2<sup>nd</sup> best performing school in Torfaen. The correlation between scores in bigger schools and smaller schools needs to be considered. Look at your data. You need to validate beyond just the buildings.

In response: We are working very closely with our schools. Teacher assessment and national test outcomes are provided in the document. For example, Blaenavon does show a drop but for one year only and we wouldn't make an assumption about performance on one year. Teacher assessments have not been vigorous enough, and Torfaen's performance has not gone down, but we have changed the way we look at teacher assessments. Garnteg is very strong.

Comment: Teacher assessments here are very good and across the cluster. They are accurate and reflect the very good work done.

In response: That is not in dispute, but Welsh Government are looking at the process.

Comment: How many teachers and classes will there be in Garnteg. Can you give a guarantee it will be ready?

In response: Funding is available to make it ready. If the proposal proceeds we will need to publish a statutory notice stating when the proposal is to be implemented. If for whatever reason it is not ready the council would seek a modification of the statutory notice, and retain this building until it is ready.

The proposal is for 5 additional classes added to the existing building in the area where the climbing frame currently sits. The frame will be relocated.

The capacity will be 420 places with 14 classrooms to accommodate pupils with an admission number of 60 (two form entry).

Comment: What about transport, there is no safe walking route.

In response: We are aware of the concerns raised in this regard if the school was to close. We will look at the available routes. If the assessments show the routes are not safe then home to school transport will be provided if the circumstances remain the same.

Comment: When will the work start?

In response: This will depend on the outcome of this consultation and decisions made. Planning is being undertaken and land surveys. It is only preparatory work at this stage.

Comment: Your projected numbers for Victoria show numbers are rising but other schools are falling.

In response: Overall, we know that 420 places will cater for learners in this catchment area. There are lots of factors to consider in projecting numbers, but the vast majority we would expect to go to a local school, but parents may elect to send their children elsewhere if there are places for them. Removing surplus places will reduce parental choice.

Comment: What is your target for reducing surplus places? There won't be any surplus at Garnteg and if you add up your projections there are more than 420 children.

In response: The target is 10% surplus across the borough as a whole. We can't force parents to go to one school, but if the parents here want their children to go to Garnteg, if Victoria closes, we will give a commitment to places in that school. The focus remains getting the best outcomes for all the pupils.

Comment: On page 12 of the consultation document you talk about developing sustainable settings and reducing the carbon footprint. Collectively you are talking about huge distances and I estimate the extra distances parents and pupils would have to travel equate to a round trip to Madrid! How is that reducing the carbon footprint?

In response: We can't answer that until we know who's going where, but we will look at any evidence you have.

Comment: I won't send my children to Garnteg if Victoria closes, they will go to Ysgol Bryn Onnen.

In response: We could not guarantee a place at Ysgol Bryn Onnen, but if parents want their children to have a Welsh Medium education we have to provide it and ensure a place is available at one of our Welsh Medium schools. If that is your choice, and depending on distances involved you may be entitled to transport. Similarly in the case of parents who might apply for a place in a Faith based setting.

It has been suggested that this school could become a Welsh Medium School, but we can assure everybody that is the first we have heard of it.

Comment: What about parking for extra cars and buses? There are already problems at Abersychan and the same will happen at Cwmffrwdoer and Garnteg if the schools are extended.

In response: All the proposed work has to go through Planning including the wider community impact it could have. A Traffic Impact Assessment (TIA) is undertaken as part of this process. We will make these available.

*(SUBSEQUENT NOTE:- TIA's for Cwmffrwdoer and Garnteg Primary Schools added to Torfaen CBC website 4<sup>th</sup> December 2015).*

Comment: Accessibility to Cwmffrwdoer is appalling.

In response: Additional on site parking and off site parking bays are proposed as part of the development.

Comment: The survey data should not be done until after decisions have been made. What are the consequences if you don't fill the places? It's a huge risk. How will you pay for your mistakes.

In response: Welsh Government has said they could claw back the funding for the Cwmffrwdoer and Garnteg proposals if we do not reduce surplus places to the 10% target. That is why we cannot take a decision on those until we know the outcome of the proposals for here and Abersychan Brynteg. It goes back to planning our long term strategy process which accepts that what is proposed is reasonable, but if Planning say no to the proposed extensions then it is back to the drawing board. We consulted on all the options in 2011 based on these proposals moving forward for the benefit of all pupils.

Comment: You are prioritising financial gain. Money means more to you than the children's' needs.

In response: The commitment of the council is to re invest capital receipts back in to the Education Service. There is a clear steer from the council in this regard.

Comment: Have you/Torfaen approached any builders regarding the value of this site?

In response: No. If the proposal is implemented, the site will be deemed surplus to educational requirements and offered to other council services. If no alternative use can be found, it will be disposed of.

Comment (Councillor G Clarke): Confirmed the process in terms of disposal and valuation and stated that as Executive Member for Housing, Planning & Public Protection that she would know if such an approach had been made.

This school is remarkable and I don't know any other school like this in terms of community. You must think carefully about how to save this school. The passion is here and that must continue in your support of the school.

Comment: Garndiffaith is a Communities first area. Are you happy to send 200 children to that school?

In response: Yes, in terms of this process, alternative provision must be at least as good as what is currently available, if not better. Estyn are one of the statutory consultees and if they don't agree it stops.

Comment: There are a high level of free school meals (FSM) at Garnteg. Standards of education are different?

In response: All schools set targets for individual learners. Levels are very good for those in receipt of FSM as well as other learners. The responsibility of the school and Education Achievement Service (EAS) is to ensure high standards. As stated previously Estyn is a key stakeholder in this process.

Comment: Children are the focus of this consultation. This could affect children's welfare.

In response: We will ensure that pupil's welfare is a key priority in this process and it will be important to manage their emotional needs. We will be working closely with the children as you know now and in the future as part of any transition arrangements should the decision be to move forward with this proposal. This is fundamental to what we are doing.

Comment: The school here has dealt with my child's emotional needs very well, but not at the Welsh school where previously attended.

Comment (pupil): Parents have to give up work or reduce their hours to take their children to and from school.

In response: This will be considered as part of the transition and has happened in previous school reorganisation proposals. We will work closely with all parties.

Comment: What about the socio-economic impact? Has it been costed or weighed in what this will remove from the community?

In response: We do not believe there will be a significant social impact, based on our experience of closures elsewhere. Any change to the economies in the area would be minimal. We don't believe it would be different.

Comment: There will be nothing else here if the school closes.

Comment (pupil): The teachers are good here, so why are you closing this school?

In response: The standards are good here and the children's voice will be heard.

Comment: The suitability survey was undertaken in 2010, adaptations have been made since then. It may be a split site but it is well integrated particularly for our DDA pupil. I.T. in the school is good. There must be merit therefore to review the suitability question?

In response: E C Harris undertook the surveys in 2010 and issued them to the council after that. Since then the council has updated and reviewed surveys on an annual basis, but there has been no significant changes that would change the original 2010 survey. It will be significant for the individual but not for the school as a whole.

Comment (Councillor D Yeowell): I wanted to sit in the audience so I could get an understanding and feeling of the passion for this school and that is clear. I along with the cabinet will make a decision on this proposal. It is not about the money but the education of all children in the borough. The council has allocated 50% of its budget to spend on education and it has been maintained at that level. I understand the issues about transport and walking routes, because I walked it myself. This consultation is live, it is not “done and dusted” and there is a democratic process to follow.

As I stated cabinet will consider the proposal and if the decision is one to proceed there is a “call in” period when councillors can object. If that happens then the proposal is scrutinised, cabinet members withdraw from the meeting and the council (including all remaining elected members) vote on the proposal.

Comment: What about the canteen facilities?

In response: There will be sufficient capacity. How it is organised will be down to the school, but arrangements will also be considered as part of the transition process.

Comment: Will you be holding another meeting?

In response: No, there will not be another public meeting. The consultation will however run until 4<sup>th</sup> January 2016 so there remains every opportunity to comment on the proposal.

CLOSE: the meeting closed at 7.45pm.

### **Staff meeting held at Abersychan Brynteg Nursery School on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2015 at 3.30pm**

Present:

County Councillor David Yeowell, Executive Member for Education  
John Tushingham, Granville Hern and Mark Horton – Torfaen CBC Education Service  
7 Members of staff.

#### Welcome and Introductions

JT welcomed those present to the meeting, and introduced the officers.

A short introduction was provided outlining the key messages in relation to this specific proposal and its relation to the overall 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme for Torfaen. Whilst this proposal was still at the consultation stage and no final

decisions had been made, it was appreciated that there would be concerns and anxieties. It was noted that staff had seen the consultation document and there would be a near 2 year period before any decisions made might be implemented. The timetable and process was then explained and then questions and comments were invited from the School staff.

### Questions and Answers

Comment: We are not very happy about the proposal. This nursery has a long standing reputation in the community. There is a risk that the good practice here will be lost. This establishment has been here since 1943 and although it might be a non statutory provision the community would lose access to a good quality early years provision.

In response: We are bringing this proposal forward because the building is poor and we have sufficient places in the area. If we go ahead with the proposal at Cwmffrwdoer there will provision there too.

Comment: But it won't be the same provision for Under 5's.

In response: This is not a criticism of what is being provided here. The issue is to ensure that the good things going on here happen elsewhere going forward.

Comment: I'm not sure you could do that. How can you guarantee that and access to other provisions?

In response: We need to ensure all providers meet the right standards, and Estyn will offer a view here on whether our proposals will help in that respect.

In terms of staff the proposed provision at Cwmffrwdoer, there will be a need to staff it. HR had already visited the school and have gone through the process in some detail. Whilst no promises can be given, staff are reminded of the Compact arrangements which all Torfaen schools have signed up to, should the need be to find alternative employment. There was a particular pressure last year, given the school reorganisation proposals underway but teaching staff were found posts. We will revisit and can discuss any fears staff may have first, but also the aspirations for staff. Some may want to go.

Comment: When will staff know? When can we approach you?

In response: I (GH) can spend a day here if it is needed.

(DY) The process is genuine and open, so talking to GH is not pre-empting anything. This is your meeting but the outcome of the consultation will be reported back to cabinet, and if necessary to Council if the decision is "called in". So it is early days at the moment in a long process.

The quality of education here is not in question. It will be a tall order but we would hope to replicate the performance as close as possible to what it is here. It is not just a "tick" boxing exercise.

I must emphasize that talking to HR representatives at this time does not mean a decision has been made.

(JT) We have looked at a number of options including a “do nothing” option. If people have got a workable alternative option then please let us know. Numbers here are small which makes it difficult to manage, and at the moment unable to run without additional financial support. The buildings here were constructed in the 1940’s and we are trying to plan for the next 25+ years.

Comment (LR): I understand that, but don’t split the staff up and certainly don’t lose them. Would there be an opportunity for them as a group at Cwmffrwdoer if this all goes through?

In response: Ideally we would want to keep the team together. We are talking to other schools (including Cwmffrwdoer). We would like to have the best professionals in the best buildings. We are looking at the best outcome, but must be careful not to overpromise, because ultimately it will be down to the School and its governing body to make any appointments.

As part of any transition arrangements, a group will be set up and will look at staffing and structures. Staff following pupils will help pupils with their transition. It has worked before with for example Two Locks Nursery and Nant Celyn Primary School and Hillside Nursery and Blaenavon Heritage VC Primary School where all staff transferred with the potential opportunities of working in a 3 to 11 setting. There is no guarantee, but we will look at all opportunities.

We appreciate that there are concerns, but staff can link with GH either as a group or on a 1:1 basis, and we will keep the Head teacher informed in terms of the process etc, but you do have contacts in the authority.

CLOSE: 4.00pm

### **Governing Body meeting held at Abersychan Brynteg Nursery School on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2015 at 4.45pm**

Present:

County Councillor David Yeowell, Executive Member for Education  
John Tushingham, Granville Hern and Mark Horton – Torfaen CBC Education Service  
6 Governors.

#### Welcome and Introductions

JT welcomed those present to the meeting, and introduced the officers.

It was noted that governors had received the document so understood what the proposal was about. It was explained that this was the consultation stage and no decisions had been made. The next stage would see a report going back to Cabinet in January 2016 to determine the next steps. If that decision is to proceed the next

stage would see the publication of a statutory notice which would take a further 4 weeks.

Governors noted that officers had just met with staff and were therefore very aware of their concerns and anxieties because of their particular position in this process.

Questions and comments were then invited from the Governing Body.

### Questions and Answers

Comment: It is such a shame; this nursery has been established for many years; Staff work very hard and as a team. If this nursery closes, what about transport, how do they get to other settings? We know it's a non statutory provision, but the good practice here, must continue.

In response: There is no question about the quality of provision here. We are advancing now with this proposal because of 2 key factors. This is the only remaining standalone nursery in the borough, with small numbers of pupils. And the building which was built in the 1940's and is in poor condition.

Standards are very important and we are conscious of moving provision, but we must make sure good quality provision is available. We accept it may not be as close as people would like. We can't 'do nothing', although that was one of the options we looked at.

Comment: But is the Cwmffrwdroer school site safe?

In response: The area as a whole is a former mining area, but a lot has been done to address the issues. A fellow councillor has raised this matter and I (DY) have visited the site. The NCB have filled in some workings near the surface that appeared. There is no reason to believe that there will be a reoccurrence. We can't predict what might happen in the future but the NCB and our own surveyors have taken every precaution possible.

Comment: Social Media is causing concern, scaremongering, and misinforming on this issue.

In response: As previously stated, significant work has been undertaken at the school. We have seen comments on social media and elsewhere, and agree many appear ill informed.

Comment: Will independent decisions be made for Brynteg and Victoria?

In response: In effect, the council will be making 4 decisions. We needed to be sure we could build the alternative provisions before considering any closures. We have support in principle from Welsh Government but with the caveat we have too address the surplus places it would result in. If we do not remove surplus places there is a risk Welsh Government will claw back the funding. If we didn't have the funding (£4M from WG) we wouldn't be here talking about potential closures.

The consultation runs until the 4<sup>th</sup> January 2016 and then we take a report back to cabinet asking that they make 4 decisions.

We could have consulted on the closures first but with no funding. We did it that way once before but were criticised by some for not having had provision in place first.

(DY) The process is not signed, sealed and delivered. It is a live process and we are genuinely keen to hear people's views. All comments are being noted. We know there is a very good level of education and provision here even if it is not in an iconic building.

I (GH) have been invited by school to discuss staffing matters. It is important to reassure staff at this time. There is a Compact agreement in place to look at staff who may be at risk of redundancy, and the Compact with schools means they must give prior consideration. As potentially one provision closes another opens, so we will be "knocking on the door". I will be coming here on 20<sup>th</sup> to discuss staff worries and aspirations. I would like to pick up the team and put them into another school but I can give no promises even though there is a clear logic.

A transition process will be established and a team including the Head, chair of governors, critical staff and officers will oversee the process and the mechanisms to make any changes happen. There will be early conversation with the Head at Cwmffrwdroer which will feed into this process.

Comment: (LR) EAS (Education Achievement Service) have been coming into Brynteg to witness the good practice here and then to share with other early years providers in the region. Teachers here are delivering best practice. We know the best teachers make the best team.

In response: Ultimately this process is about improving education across the borough. Governing Bodies are responsible for staffing but what we can promise is that this is our 9<sup>th</sup> similar scenario and the council do not want to lose good staff and the investment made in them. The governing body will appoint. The Compact is good in terms of recruitment practice.

The existing team with a new building wrapped around them would be ideal, but the proposals are about the best teachers in post. Standards must be at least equal to if not better than what is currently available, and that is subject to external validation.

Comment: Communication is key in this process, but the best facilities will help them to make the best decision.

Comment: Will there be transport to Garnteg?

In response: If pupils are attending the catchment area school and there are no safe routes available we have to provide transport. The routes are measured/checked from individual home addresses and we will consult on that with those affected as part of the process if the proposals go ahead.

Comment: You need to speak to relatives about the changes, they could be adversely affected. They want a good education for their families. Life won't be ruined by the proposals but you need to consider this.

In response: We appreciate your concerns in this regard. I (DY) have witnessed this at first hand recently during the implementation of the Fairwater High/Llantarnam Schools closure proposals. A very irate lady at the time whose daughter was affected by the changes, approached me only recently to say how much her daughter had settled and how well she was doing in her new setting. The people who matter most are the learners and are usually the most resilient.

It is important to note that this is not the only opportunity you have to comment on these proposals and you can do so in a variety of ways by the closing date of 4<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

CLOSE: 5.45pm

### **Parents/Interested Parties meeting held at Abersychan Brynteg Nursery School on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2015 at 6.00pm**

#### Present:

County Councillor David Yeowell, Executive Member for Education  
Dermot McChrystal, John Tushingam and Mark Horton – Torfaen CBC Education Service  
7 Parents/Carers and Other Interested Parties.

#### Welcome and Introductions

DM welcomed those present to the meeting, and introduced the officers.

A short introduction was provided outlining the key messages in relation to this specific proposal and its relation to the overall 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme for Torfaen. It was explained that this was at the consultation stage and no final decisions had been made.

Questions and comments were then invited from the parents and other interested parties.

#### Questions and Answers

Comment: The cabinet report in 2012 stated there would be no closure until 2020 and you wrote to the school in August to say Victoria wouldn't close. Why are we here now?

In response: The programme was agreed in 2011 by council and sent to Welsh Government who agreed to it in principle. Brynteg was a band B proposal once alternative provision was available. Alternative provision is now planned for 2017 so the closure proposal has been brought forward.

There were no formal plans to close Victoria at the time of writing although the proposal has always remained in Band A for delivery by 2019. Did we know this could happen? Yes we did. It is an issue of timing, and looking at in order. For Cwmffrwdor and Garnteg we had an in principle agreement for funding from Welsh Government in August in relation to the proposals to extend those schools. This was reported to Cabinet in September who at the same time recommended that we formally consult on the Brynteg and Victoria proposals. If Welsh Government had not agreed to fund those projects we wouldn't be here now because there would be no viable option.

Comment: If you close this nursery where will the children go? I can't afford the bus fares for only a 2 ½ hour session.

In response: There will be alternative provision at Garnteg or Cwmffrwdor or other maintained settings if parents want it. There are also registered private/voluntary early years settings.

Comment: On page 32 of your document it shows Brynteg is a higher category school than Cwmffrwdor. How can the provision be better?

In response: You are not comparing like for like. At the moment there is no nursery provision at Cwmffrwdor. However Estyn will have their say on this proposal, and their comments will be included in its entirety in the consultation report when it is published.

Comment: You have suggested Cwmffrwdor as one alternative, but what happens then when we apply for a place in reception? What about transport? Access is an issue.

In response: This is a separate process again when applying for a statutory age place in reception. Transport will be provided in line with current policy.

Comment: Children will be late if they have to travel further. They will be marked as absent. This will be very stressful for families.

In response: There is a responsibility on parents to get children to school on time, but the council has not yet issued any fixed penalty notices in that regard. The aim is not to criminalise, but work with parents. There will be other support in the community.

Comment: Garnteg nursery only offers 4 days a week, not 5 like here?

In response: We will check this, but nursery aged children are entitled to 15 hours per week.

*(SUBSEQUENT NOTE:- Garnteg Primary School has confirmed that its nursery unit is open 5 days a week with morning and afternoon sessions available on each day).*

Comment: Page 14 of the consultation document indicates that Cwmffrwdroer Under 5's will continue if the nursery at Cwmffrwdroer proceeds. Will it?

In response: It is anticipated that it will continue operating because of the number of people who want to use it.

Comment: What about the impact on self employed providers/child minders if Brynteg goes. It could impact on different scenarios.

In response: There is no easy answer to that, but other providers may come to the fore. This is why we maintain a balance of private and public providers so arrangements are in place to meet many different family scenarios and to cover wraparound facilities wherever possible.

Comment: When was the decision made for Cwmffrwdroer to have a nursery and not Victoria?

In response: Around 2010/2011 when the programme was developed and agreed in principle. The main factors were surplus places and condition, and Victoria was not suitable. This was reported to council in November 2011. If you have alternative options please let us know.

Comment: The main building at Victoria is ok. You could build where the demountable is. You need to take a fresh look at the whole programme.

In response: You can bring that forward as an alternative option, but the validity of the programme remains. We would need to see your evidence in case we have missed something.

Comment: You can't take a broad brush approach to this. We have the power to speak up for our children, and the passion shown here should influence your decision. You are not pressed by Welsh Government. Think long term.

In response: Clearly we will need to reflect the views of the community, and your comments will be part of the debate. This is a long term programme, with Band A, the first of 4 bands, running to 2019.

Comment: If this is not funded, what happens?

In response: This will be a matter for Elected Members. They will need to decide whether to:

- Go ahead as proposed
- Go ahead but with variations (4) of the proposals
- Stop it altogether

Do they want to proceed? There is no guarantee.

Comment: If the proposals don't go forward, there will be no extensions?

In response: £8M would not be invested in our schools as planned to date and we would need to reconsider our remaining Band A proposals and beyond.

Comment: What are they building at Garnteg? There are workmen on site and canopies are being erected.

In response: Nothing. Until this proposal is determined no building work will start. What is going on at the moment is land survey work. The canopies are self funded by the school and are their own enhancements and not related to this proposal.

Comment: The population data set is out of date. What about the 200 refugees that are coming, have you factored those in?

In response: This is the most current and up to date information we have. Six families are being accommodated across Torfaen and not 200.

Comment: Will there be a reception class in Victoria in September 2016?

In response: Yes, no decision has yet been made on the proposal.

Comment: When will this go to cabinet? Who will make the decision?

In response: It is anticipated that it will go to Cabinet in January 2016 to determine the next steps. It could be "called in" meaning that it will be considered by Council (but not cabinet members). This will mean that council are able to question the validity and sense of any decision made. There will be every opportunity to scrutinise any decisions. The 36 remaining members can debate and decide. As a local member for the Panteg ward I (DY) for example "called in" the decision in relation to Kemys Fawr Infants School. In spite of some cynicism this is not a forgone conclusion.

Comment: There are personal agendas between members. We vote people in and they are deciding on our children's futures.

In Response: Parents of children here and at Victoria know their children are doing well and we can understand your feelings. It is a genuine and live debate and all comments will be entered into the consultation appraisal. The process doesn't finish here but goes to the 4<sup>th</sup> January 2016, so it is important to let us know your views. That is the edict of Welsh Government. We are here to provide an evidence base/rationale to proceed.

Comment: There will be pre agenda with recommendations. How confident are you that they will make the right decision?

In response: In terms of scrutiny, how are they effective? It is strong and vigorous and more challenging. Scrutiny can call on outside persons, who are autonomous from the council. Scrutiny chairs this part of the process, and has "teeth" and is the basis on which good government thrives. This is an improvement on previous practice.

Comment: Could you close both or one or the other schools?

In response: If the case is made for a different solution it will be considered. The proposals are however linked.

Comment: Could the money be better spent?

In response: This proposal is not just about condition; not just about surplus places. The Welsh Government programme for funding used to be an annual grant, not a long term vision, which is where we are now. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Programme is the only chance we will have for a long time to significantly invest in our schools

Comment: I don't agree, what you are saying is misleading. There is an alternative at Victoria village, you could extend there. It might not be cost effective to you but it is good for the community.

In response: We do not think it is possible to expand at Victoria, but if you have an option please let us know. The proposals are in no way a criticism of the education here or at Victoria.

Comment: There is no disputing the quality of education, but will children thrive in a bigger school environment?

In response: We don't underestimate the depth of passion and commitment to these schools. The quality and calibre of questions and comments here are not understated, but there are risks of doing nothing. I cannot emphasize how much a genuine process this is and we listen to your views.

It is not a one off decision. Whatever the outcome we need to come back. If the recommendation is to proceed there will be a statutory notice period providing a formal opportunity to object to the proposal. There will be lots of work to be done going forward.

We will carry on communicating after this. There is an indicative timeline on pages 37 & 38 of the consultation document which explains the process.

Comment: I am sure you can see how passionate we are about our children here and at Victoria, but can I thank officers and Executive Member for their attendance here tonight.

CLOSE: 7.30pm