



SPECIAL COUNCIL - 23RD OCTOBER 2012

SUBJECT: CWMCARN HIGH SCHOOL

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR – EDUCATION & LIFELONG LEARNING

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval from Council to support the financial costs associated with ensuring education of Cwmcarn High School (CHS) pupils is delivered up to the end of the current academic year in the most appropriate way.
- 1.2 The report only deals with temporary arrangements until the end of the current academic year. Further reports will be prepared for Council to consider options for a longer term solution.

2. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 2.1 The report links directly to the Education for Life and sustainability strategies.

3. THE REPORT

Interim Arrangements (from 5th November 2012 until the end of the current academic year)

- 3.1 Members will be aware that following the receipt of a structural report on Friday, 12th October 2012, parents were advised by letter that day that CHS would be closed with immediate effect, pending further detailed asbestos investigations.
- 3.2 As a consequence of this decision, officers have been working with the school's senior leadership team and governors to explore alternative arrangements for pupils and staff.
- 3.3 As part of these deliberations, the health and wellbeing of both pupils and staff has been the foremost consideration, mindful of the need to ensure pupils are in receipt of suitable education as soon as is practically possible.
- 3.4 To date, Years 10 – 13 have returned to the Cwmcarn site for their education up until half term.

Options Appraisal

- 3.5 Mindful of the need to provide suitable education to all CHS pupils as soon as possible, a detailed options appraisal has been undertaken. Four options were initially evaluated and their relative advantages and disadvantages were considered.

- 3.6 The four options were as follows:-
1. Provision of temporary classrooms on the CHS site to facilitate Years 7-10 pupils, with Years 11-13 accommodated in the existing Performing Arts and Languages buildings.
 2. Transferring the school population to other CCBC school sites.
 3. Combination of options 1 and 2, with Years 11-13 remaining on CHS site as in Option 1 with the remaining (Years 7-10) pupils transferred as in option 2.
 4. Retaining all CHS pupils on an alternative site
- 3.7 As regards **Option 1**, four companies provided indicative costs for 30 classrooms (15 double demountable classroom buildings) and one of these companies also provided an estimate for a 2 storey building. 3 of the 4 companies advised they could be completed on site by early January and the 4th advised 80% completion by that date.
- 3.8 The need for further site investigations, the health and safety of pupils, together with insurance issues effectively rendered this option untenable. The education of CHS pupils for the next half term would not have been possible either.
- 3.9 Given the difficulties associated with remaining on CHS site in the short term, **Option 3** was not considered suitable for the reasons outlined in option 1.
- 3.10 As regards **Option 2**, two sub options were considered, namely:-
- a. Provision for CHS pupils in separate classrooms at various schools, with use of specialist facilities
 - b. Integration of CHS pupils into existing classroom facilities at the 'host' schools.
- 3.11 In relation to **Option 4**, a suitably sized site had been identified, namely the Ebbw Vale campus of Coleg Gwent which was vacated in July 2012.
- 3.12 The 4 options were initially presented to CHS's senior leadership team and Chair of Governors. The Governing Body on 18th October expressed a preference for Option 1 but acknowledged this option was untenable and so Option 3 was similarly not considered. In considering the 2 remaining options, the Governing Body was unanimous in favouring option 4 i.e. the Ebbw Vale campus of Coleg Gwent, emphasising it was important to retain the school's ethos, standards and community spirit.
- 3.13 In relation to **Option 2a**, CHS specified their classroom requirements, stipulating that dispersal to more than 2 sites would render the effective delivery of the curriculum unmanageable. Four local secondary schools (Risca, Newbridge, Pontllanfraith and Oakdale) were contacted to check availability for a 5th November commencement. Risca and Newbridge were able to offer provision of 1 Year Group each (based on suitability for Years 7-9), but not without the need for reorganising present arrangements. No whole year group options were offered by Pontllanfraith or Oakdale in the required timescales.
- 3.14 This option was therefore rendered unsuitable as insufficient provision existed to make this effective.
- 3.15 **Option 2b** involves redistributing CHS pupils across other local secondary schools with surplus places, essentially the 4 schools contacted re option 2a. Sufficient places exist for this option but spread across at least 3 schools.
- 3.16 CHS's Governing Body expressed a number of concerns in relation to splitting CHS pupils in this manner. Their main concerns were that this option would have an adverse effect on CHS standards with the likelihood of compulsory redundancies as CHS staff would similarly need to be dispersed. Officers share the concerns expressed by CHS's Governing Body in relation to this as a short term option.

- 3.17 In relation to **Option 4**, officers have visited the Ebbw Vale site, together with a member of CHS staff. The campus buildings were vacated 3 months ago, with the relocation to the former steel works site in Ebbw Vale, as part of the new 3-19 campus arrangements. This is a suitable option which previously accommodated circa 2000 students.
- 3.18 This option would require transporting circa 840 pupils from CHS to the campus and return per day. The estimated travel time is 35-40 minutes each way for this journey. As stated above, this is the favoured option of CHS's Governing Body.
- 3.19 The Coleg Gwent Campus is available only for the current academic year as it is scheduled for redevelopment in Summer 2013.

Home to School Transport

- 3.19 Both options 2 and 4 would involve significant additional transport costs. Most of this spend does not accord with present Council transport policy, but is considered essential given the emergency nature of this proposal.
- 3.20 As regards option 4, travel times for many pupils would likely exceed 1 hour each way, when combining home to school (CHS) and the CHS to/from the Ebbw Vale campus. This exceeds the Welsh Government's preferred travel time as per the Learner Travel Measure, but would be necessary to facilitate CHS's favoured option, at least in the short term, given the emergency nature of this proposal.

4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Given the urgent nature of the report, an Equalities Impact Assessment has not been completed, but will be progressed in due course, once a decision has been taken and any equalities issues addressed.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The estimated cost of option 4, for the remainder of the academic year could be up to £1,420,000 and includes re-commissioning of the Ebbw vale campus building, revenue/running costs and transport. This assumes CHS contribute towards the running costs of the Ebbw Vale campus.
- 5.2 Members are advised that options 2a and 2b would involve additional transport costs in the region of £530,000 to £630,000.
- 5.3 A projected underspend on home to school transport for 2012/13 of £400,000 will be the first call on increased transport costs. An amount of £200,000 can be made available from Local Management of Schools contingencies. This would leave an amount of up to £820,000 to be funded from General Fund balances to meet the costs associated with option 4.
- 5.4 Additional costs common to options 2 and 4 to secure the CHS site and cover residual costs of an empty building are estimated at £100,000.
- 5.5 Members are advised that General Fund balances are £10,047,000.

6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 These will be dependent on the chosen option.

7. CONSULTATIONS

- 7.1 Consultations have been ongoing with CHS's Governing Body and senior leadership team and their views have been reflected in the report.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 Members to determine whether they wish to financially support the recommendation of CHS's Governing Body to temporarily relocate to the Ebbw Vale campus of Coleg Gwent for the remainder of the present academic year.

9. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 To facilitate continuity in teaching and learning for all CHS pupils, with effect from Monday, 5th November, 2012 for the remainder of the current academic year.

10. STATUTORY POWER

- 10.1 School Standards and Framework Act 1998.
Local Government Act 1972.

Author: Sandra Aspinall, Corporate Director, Education & Lifelong Learning
Email: aspins@caerphilly.gov.uk

Consultees: Cllr. Rhianon Passmore, Cabinet Member for Education & Lifelong Learning
Cllr. Keith Reynolds, Deputy Leader
Corporate Management Team
Dan Perkins, Head of Legal and Governance
Nicole Scammell, Head of Corporate Finance