



## **EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 8TH JANUARY 2019**

**SUBJECT: CWMCARN HIGH SCHOOL – CLOSURE UPDATE**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES**

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 To provide Members with an update in relation to the closure of Cwmcarn High School.

### **2. SUMMARY**

2.1 The report provides a background to the decision to close Cwmcarn High School and the subsequent agreement for a new classroom build at Newbridge School and demolition works at Cwmcarn High School.

2.2 The report updates Members on the closure from a staff, pupil and Authority perspective.

### **3. LINKS TO STRATEGY**

3.1 The report links directly to the Education, sustainability and regeneration strategies, particularly in the context of provision of modern fit for purpose teaching and learning environments.

3.2 The report links directly to the Authority's Corporate Plan and specifically Well-being Objective 2018 – 2023, Improving Education Opportunities for All.

3.3 The report contributes to the Well-being Goals within the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2016. In particular, as follows:

- A prosperous Wales, by ensuring appropriate levels of education provision for learners thus enhancing their employment potential.
- A healthier Wales, supporting vulnerable learners can improve their well-being and educational achievement.
- A more equal Wales, a society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background is.
- A Wales of cohesive communities (in the context of improving quality of life with attractive, viable, safe and well connected communities).
- A globally responsible Wales – By contributing to the continued improvement of the Economic, Social, Environment and Cultural Well-being of the Borough.

#### 4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 At its meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2016, the Governing Body of Cwmcarn High School made the difficult decision to seek to close the school.
- 4.2 Welsh Government's Cabinet Secretary for Education wrote to the Chair of Governors on 5th October 2016 advising that she had consented to the Governing Body issuing notice under the Schools Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 to discontinue the school in view of the Governing Body's decision on 27th June.
- 4.3 The Chair of Governors, on behalf of the Governing Body, wrote to Welsh Government's Cabinet Secretary for Education on 10th October, 2016, to give Welsh Ministers two years written notice of their intention to discontinue the school. The Council was also informed of this decision at that time by letter.
- 4.4 The school therefore closed on 10th October 2018, under Schedule 1, Paragraph 7 of the Schools Standard and Framework Act 1998 on dissolution of the Governing Body the land and buildings automatically transferred to the Authority.
- 4.5 In order to plan for closure, the Council submitted a £3m business case to Welsh Government (21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools) as follows:
- additional classrooms at Newbridge School to manage the initial increase and to accommodate any Cwmcarn High School pupils who advised that they wished to transfer there at the date of decision to discontinue Cwmcarn High School, and
  - undertake demolition works at both Cwmcarn High School and Newbridge School.
- 4.6 Members agreed, at the Cabinet meeting on 30th November 2016, that the Authority would meet the required capital investment of £1.5 million (50%) of match funding to the project.
- 4.7 Welsh Government approved the scheme, in principle, on 14th September, 2016 and following the submission of a full business case confirmed the grant allocation of £1.5M as part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools and Education Band A programme in September 2017.
- 4.8 The works at Newbridge School are now complete.
- 4.9 The demolition works will commence at the Cwmcarn High site as soon as possible to minimise standing and security costs and to remove the anti-social behaviour/vandalism risk. The relatively new build Arts Block is the only school building in good condition and this will be excluded from the demolition works.
- 4.10 Members will be aware that the Authority's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools and Education programme includes a proposal to use the site for future educational provision.
- 4.11 The Council, along with the Education Achievement Service (EAS) and the school, have worked collaboratively to ensure the pupils' education has not been disadvantaged during the 2 year closure period.
- 4.12 Senior Officers from the Authority have met regularly with the Executive Headteacher, Staff and Governors throughout the process to discuss and offer support and advice when needed.
- 4.13 Through collaborative working support mechanisms were put in place from a number of Directorates to ensure that robust procedures were established to assist throughout the final months before school closure. This has included ensuring smooth transition of pupils, staff support and the re-locating and safe storage of all pupil and staff records and site security.
- 4.14 All suitable surplus equipment/furniture in the first instance was taken by neighbouring schools followed by other schools within the Borough.

- 4.15 The Human Resources team have worked very closely with the school over the last two years in order to secure employment for Cwmcarn High staff. The Headteachers of Caerphilly Secondary Schools have been extremely supportive in facilitating these arrangements which has resulted in a significant number of Cwmcarn High staff being redeployed.
- 4.16 A number of Cwmcarn High staff requested Voluntary Redundancy or Voluntary Early Retirement.
- 4.17 At the time of closure there were 14 compulsory redundancies, consisting of 4 teaching/SMT staff and 10 support staff.
- 4.18 In line with the Authority's School Admission arrangements the pupils who were on roll at Cwmcarn School were accommodated at alternative schools.  
49 of the 52 pupils were accommodated in their parent's first preference school  
3 of the 52 were accommodated in the second preference school.
- 4.19 Cwmcarn High School had experienced budgetary problems over recent years and that had been exacerbated by dramatic falling rolls following the closure announcement. In February 2018, as part of the 2018/19 budget, Members agreed to set aside £1.4M from the General fund to meet the then projected deficit on closure. The deficit position is now updated to a figure of £1.7m. There remain a few outstanding queries and some smaller invoices are still being received, consequently a final position on the deficit at closure will be included in the outturn report for 2018/19. In addition an update will be provided with regards to meeting the funding gap.

## 5. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

- 5.1 This proposal contributes to the Well-being Goals as set out in Links to Strategy above. It is consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act in that:
- **Long Term** - The reduction of surplus places in the area and the more effective use of educational resources will support schools to raise standards, improve service and increase opportunities.
  - **Prevention** - Improving the quality of the Education estate generally will support pupils in their long term education and skills.
  - **Integration** – An aligned and coherent curriculum increasing the opportunities to fulfil individual pupil needs, extending curriculum entitlement and giving the potential to share resources.
  - **Collaboration** – The Council, along with the Education Achievement Service (EAS) and the school, have worked collaboratively to ensure the pupils' education has not been disadvantaged during the closure period.
  - **Involvement** – Through collaborative working support mechanisms will be put in place from a number of Directorates to ensure that robust procedures are established to assist throughout the final months of the school closure. This will include ensuring site security, smooth transition of pupils, staff support and the re-locating and safe storage of all pupil and staff records.

## 6. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The process that has been followed by the Governing Body to close the schools under Section 80 of The Schools Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 has been outlined above and can be evidenced in the background papers. As outlined in 4.21 above all pupils currently attending Cwmcarn High School have been accommodated in alternative schools for September 2018.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 Members agreed, at the Cabinet meeting on 30th November 2016, that the Authority would meet the required capital investment of £1.5 million (50%) of match funding for the project.
- 7.2 Cwmcarn High School had experienced budgetary problems over recent years and that had been exacerbated by dramatic falling rolls due to the closure announcement. In February 2018, as part of the 2018/19 budget, Members agreed to set aside £1.4M from the General fund to meet the then projected deficit on closure. The deficit position is now updated to a figure of £1.7m. There remain a few outstanding queries and some smaller invoices are still being received, consequently a final position on the deficit at closure will be included in the outturn report for 2018/19. In addition an update will be provided with regards to meeting the funding gap.
- 7.3 Within the Secondary Sector, several years ago a sum of £1M was delegated to schools to fund redundancy, which included Cwmcarn High. For the first time in 2011/12, it was agreed to pay a 40% contribution to secondary schools due to the ever-increasing financial situation resulting from, in the main, falling rolls.
- 7.4 The Authority's share of the release costs for staff (40%) has been met from the Education Directorate's "Early retirement and pension costs" budget. It was previously reported that due to the extent of the losses at Cwmcarn High this could cause a potential pressure on this budget in 2018/19. The current projected overspend on this budget heading is circa £53k, which is linked to the losses at the School. This position will be updated at outturn, when the final spend details against this budget heading are confirmed.

## **8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The Council worked closely with Cwmcarn High School and was extremely successful in securing alternative employment for Cwmcarn High School staff. Other secondary schools were extremely supportive in facilitating these arrangements.
- 8.2 At the time of closure there were 14 compulsory redundancies, consisting of 4 teaching/SMT staff and 10 support staff.
- 8.3 The Headteacher of Newbridge School continued in her role as Executive Headteacher of Cwmcarn High School until the date of closure. This arrangement worked extremely well.

## **9. CONSULTATIONS**

- 9.1 The draft report was distributed as detailed below. All comments received have been reflected in the report.

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 10.1 Members are requested to note the contents of the report with regards to the school closure.

## **11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 11.1 To provide an update in relation to the closure of Cwmcarn High School.

## 12. STATUTORY POWER

- 12.1 School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013.  
The School Organisation Code. Welsh Government (2013).  
The Schools Standard and Framework Act 1998.

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### Background Papers:

- Cabinet Report 30<sup>th</sup> November 2016 – Cwmcarn High - Planned Closure.
- Cabinet Report 14<sup>th</sup> February 2018 – Budget Proposals 2018/19 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2018/2023.
- The Chair of Governors letter to WG dated 29<sup>th</sup> June 2016.
- WG response to the above letter dated 5<sup>th</sup> July 2016.
- The Chair of Governors letter to WG dated 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2016.
- Welsh Government's Cabinet Secretary for Education letter of 5<sup>th</sup> October 2016.
- The Chair of Governors letter to Welsh Government's Cabinet Secretary for Education on 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2016.