

Hiraethog Area – Nominated Stakeholder Meeting Notes
Thursday 15th October 2009

Present: Geraint James (GJ) (Statutory Head of Education Services)
Dilwyn Price (DP) (Head of School Improvement Services)
Emma Bayliss (EB) (Project Manager)
Carol Roberts (CR) (Secretary – Education Services)
Gareth Thomas (GT) (TJB)
David Batten (DB) (TJB)
Cynan Jones (CJ) (TJB)

Observers: Cllr W. Edwards
Cllr W. E. Jones

1. Introduction

GT provided an introduction to the meeting and explained what would be involved including the workshop element.

2. Presentations

GJ gave a presentation on the progress of the project so far and the development of the Areas for Review document.

Question and Answer Session (Q = question, A = Answer, C= Comment)

Q: What is the most important driver for this project?

A: Ensuring the quality and high standards of education in each of the schools. Funding does however underpin everything and decisions are made on the money available.

C: What comes first – the children's education or the budget? It must be the budget otherwise these meetings would not take place. Estyn stresses the value of small schools and how children from small schools succeed academically. Children do not get as much attention in larger schools. One idea could be to move children from larger schools to smaller schools. Small schools encourage belonging and a sense of community. Unfilled places shouldn't be seen as a bad thing otherwise we'll start treating children like battery hens. There is no educational argument for getting rid of small schools. Only thing that the rural communities get from their Council tax is the schools. By moving children to schools outside of the community, it will increase the dependency on transport and increase environmental problems. This exercise should be based on educational standards and not on the money available.

A: Thank you for your comments, these will all be taken into account.

Q: Cannot believe that in 18 months the Education service has not decided anything – what have you been doing for the past 18 months?

A: Collating information, sharing possibilities and options.

Q: So there is no solid plan for Llangwm?

A: No there is not. The purpose of these meetings is to come to the community with the information about each school, present it to you and obtain feedback.

Q: Unfilled places – how is the school capacity calculated?

A: DP will explain this in his presentation.

DP then gave a presentation on the specific school data including information on 'fit for purpose', unfilled places and catchment areas. Noted that the number of unfilled places was calculated via a formula from the Welsh Assembly and the floor space within the schools.

Question and Answer Session (Q = question, A = Answer, C= Comment)

- Q: The population of Llangwm could change over the next 5 years.
- A: The projections have been correct to within 1% over the last 12 years.
- C: There has been a reduction in pupil numbers and then an increase in most rural areas, this will happen in Llangwm.
- A: Projections are based on the number of pupils coming through the school.
- Q: How are the projections calculated?
- A: Explained regarding average and taking pupil numbers through the schools.
- C: Need to take account the number of young people in the area and whether they are going to have children. Think the number of pupils is going to increase over the next few years as lots of young couples in the community and will send their children to the local school. Think this reduction in pupils is temporary.
- A: Accept that there could be a reduction and then an increase. This will be taken into consideration and the list of young people that you have provided will also be taken back and discussed.
- C: Currently there are 30 young people between the age of 20 and 30 in the area and that is just Llangwm.
- C: The lack of affordable housing in the community also has to be considered. The Council's planning policy has an impact on rural areas and the availability of houses that young people can afford. You cannot get planning permission to build in Llangwm and this needs to be considered and relooked at.
- A: Comments regarding planning issues have been passed to planning and the Cabinet are currently reviewing the approach to which Planning Applications are assessed particularly in rural areas.
- Q: How is the cost per pupil calculated?
- A: The budget for each school divided by the number of pupils.
- C: The school can find ways of being more efficient and saving money.
- A: Have to employ 2 teachers even if there is only 1 child in the school. Have to be mindful that community development is also being considered in the areas that are for initial review.
- Q: You must have some sort of idea about what you have planned for Llangwm.
- A: That will be the next step – presenting options for specific schools. The Areas for Review Document gives the whole picture in terms of facts but once we get feedback from these meetings, we can put together the draft strategy.
- C: Keep focusing on the money side of it. We pay Council tax and get nothing back.
- Q: There are many unfilled places across the County, move children from larger schools into smaller schools.
- A: Cannot force this to happen because of parental choice.
- Q: Think you could advertise this to parents in other areas. Children from Dinmael should have moved to Llangwm.
- A: Did offer them this option

- C: Parents from Dinmael thought Llangwm would close next so didn't move their children here.
- Q: No matter what happens – you are saying that there will be a change?
- A: Cannot sustain 62 schools as WAG lowering the budget available every year. Less money is coming from WAG because the number of pupils is decreasing.
- C: Need to ask politicians to increase funding.
- A: Our local members and politicians are doing this but we have only received a 1% increase this year because of the demography of the population. WAG have stated that unfilled places must decrease but they also support small schools. Less funding each year means that we cannot improve schools and soon enough there will not be enough money to maintain them.

GT explained workshop part of the meeting – want to look at what is working well and what could be improved. All present decided that they did not want to take part in a workshop but rather continue with the question and answer session.

3. Final Question and Answer Session (Q = question, A = Answer, C= Comment)

- C: It is now time for the Education service to feedback to us and let us know their plans for our community. We are scared to talk in case it puts us in a bad light. If you are going to close the school on the basis of unfilled places, this is going to cause trouble. Please put your cards on the table and tell us what you want from us. What options are available?
- A: Once received your feedback, we can come back with options.
- C: Need to know options available now as don't want you to leave this meeting and think that all we're open to is the status quo.
- C: If the school closes, where are the children going to go. Standard of education is so high in Llangwm.
- A: An option could be an Area school at Cerrigydrudion
- C: Why would we have to amalgamate with Cerrigydrudion, we have more in common with Ysbyty Ifan, Penmachno and Pentrefoelas.
- A: This is why we wanted to do the workshop as this is the type of feedback we need. (then explained an area school in more detail). This type of school would provide access to the 21st Century funding.
- Q: Is clustering or federation an option as this will stop the school having to close?
- A: Those are both an option. Federalisation means one head, one governing body but keep sites as they are.
- C: This school is an excellent resource here and we should use buildings that we already have.
- A: Federalisation can lead to the buildings being kept open.
- Q: When you did earlier roadshows what did you learn?
- A: The key priorities document was developed on the basis of those roadshows.
- Q: Do all the areas for initial review include communities with small schools?
- A: No, the schools on the coast that are for initial review are large schools.
- Q: Where do you start making the changes, which areas will be affected first?

- A: These meetings will help prioritise the areas that will be changed in the first instance. Some areas more receptive to change.
- Q: Is there a timescale for change?
- A: No timescale for change but will not take place for the next 5-10 years.
- Q: After what you have heard tonight, are you more supportive of Llangwm?
- A: Have to take what you've said tonight into consideration but can't give a final opinion. Understand that you would be happy with some sort of joint working but want the school to stay in place. Will take these views forward but need to take the rest of the County into consideration.
- Q: Will WAG give grant monies to refurbish old schools?
- A: We can ask WAG if this is possible.
- C: Cabinet need to understand importance of Llangwm
- A: The value of rural schools will be put forward to Cabinet and a lot of members of the Cabinet are from rural areas.
- Q: The Councillors follow officers to make decisions so you can't just say that it's up to them.
- A: Officers will offer recommendations and proposals but these are challenged via Scrutiny. There is a Project Board in place so other Officers, rather than just us, will look at the detail and feedback before presenting anything to Councillors.
- Q: What will you feedback regarding Llangwm?
- A: We'll take back what you've said tonight and include it in the proposals. Need to look at County as a whole.
- Q: You have noted various options, what can we do now in Llangwm?
- A: You can collect as much evidence as possible to support your case and feed it back before the end of November.

GT thanked everyone for their attendance and contribution to the meeting as a lot of important information was gained.