

COUNCIL – 26 JULY 2017

AGENDA ITEM 9

Question from Councillor Alex Williams to the Cabinet Member Education and Regeneration

“Will the Cabinet Member for Education and Regeneration outline Bridgend County Borough Council’s view on the Welsh Government’s proposals to change the School Organisation Code”?

Response from the Cabinet Member Education and Regeneration to Councillor Alex Williams

The School Organisation Code, which came into force in October 2013, underpins the provision introduced by the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013. The Code, which is the statutory process with regards to school organisation changes, has been applied to all proposals since that time.

Certain sections of the original Code were not considered sufficiently explicit which resulted in clarifications being sought from Welsh Government in relation to a number of elements prescribed within the document.

Council officers across Wales have had an opportunity to contribute to the amended Code and Welsh Government have taken their views on board and incorporated changes to reflect those clarifications within the draft revised document.

There are some proposed changes contained within the Code, one of which is in respect of surplus school places. Proposers are asked to manage excessive surplus places, however this does not automatically mean closing schools.

The Code encourages proposers to look at other options available to them and their schools, for example clustering, collaboration or federation with other schools and making use of the existing building as a community resource. They are also encouraged to rationalise school space by co-locating services within the school to offset costs.

Also, there is a change proposed in respect of a presumption against rural schools. The aim is to ensure that decisions are taken to close rural schools only after all alternatives to closure have been conscientiously considered. This will require proposers to follow a more detailed set of procedures and requirements in formulating a rural school closure proposal and in consulting on and reaching a decision as to whether to implement a rural school closure proposal.

Welsh Government has produced a list of rural schools which has been included within the draft revision of the Code. While there are no schools within Bridgend currently identified within Welsh Government’s list of rural schools, we will have to consider whether there are any schools within the borough which should be given this status and ensure this is conveyed within the Council’s response.

The revised document appears to give clarity and is more explicit and this is welcomed. Officers are in the process of formulating a response to Welsh Government's consultation which closes on 30 September 2017.

Cllr Charles Smith
Cabinet Member Education and Regeneration