

Dear Councillor,

Closure of Schools

I hope it will be possible for you to set aside a few minutes to read and consider this message.

A prominent Plaid Cymru member of Carmarthenshire Council states in "*Golwg*" on 6th September, 2007 that councillors outside the small select "cabinet" are "...*without any power at all*" and also "... *have no voice in the Council*". He goes on to mention "*the lack of democracy*" of such a system.

It appears that the situation is worse in Cyngor Gwynedd. Since starting to talk about the closure of schools (let's avoid fancy terms) it was feared that it was a small clique of senior officers and members who make decisions on Cyngor Gwynedd with councillors, even within the formal "board", having to follow suit.

Councillor Penri Jones' letter in "*Golwg*", 15th November 2007, confirms these fears. As leader of the Education Portfolio he says that seeing the document (the final version it would seem) for the first time was "*as much of a shock to me as it was to the parents and governors*". He then goes on to state that he attempted to have a discussion on the document with "...*education officers...and a small group of councillors*" (sic) (please note that he does not refer at all to the membership of the board as a whole, even though they are a fairly small number in total). This message is absolutely clear, we think. This is how Cyngor Gwynedd works.

The question is: Where does this leave the other 60 members of Cyngor Gwynedd who are outside even the formal "board"? More important still, where does this leave those who elected these councillors, who more than likely have no true voice on the Council, on important issues such as the closure of schools which could have a significant and permanent effect on their communities? We are absolutely sure that every one of these councillors are sincere and anxious to represent their communities as best they possibly can, a many regularly travelling great distances, e.g. from the far reaches of Llyn and South Merioneth, all the way to Caernarfon merely to "*rubber stamp*" decisions already taken. The problem is that the cliquish workings and culture of the Council does not allow them to influence decisions.

Ironically, the situation of Plaid Cymru councillors outside the board or even outside the inner clique, could be worse, as those councillors are often stopped from discussing publicly or revealing information from meetings that are closed to the public, e.g. the group's meeting in Porthmadog on 12th November 2007, and the 'gagging' letter Plaid's councillors are believed to have received at the beginning of September 2007 instructing them not to attend public discussions on the matter of school closures.

In a period of cutbacks, and where the Council is seen to have more interest in the north east of the county at the expense of the rural areas, this lack of a democratic voice, is seen as particularly harsh on rural areas and on areas in the south and west of the county. It is here, of course, where most schools due for closure are located (and also the number most likely to close sometime in the future following formal federalization), these are the areas where the economy is at it most fragile, where service provision is a challenge and the greatest changes in the percentage of Welsh speakers. If it's the

schools' turn this time, what will be next? With the emphasis on developing the Afon Menai area, it appears that the Council rulers have more interest in the prosperity of Ynys Môn than in large areas of its own territory.

We therefore request , for the sake of the majority of areas within Gwynedd, that you oppose in every way, this half baked scheme. A full study of the impact on the language, the community and the economy of those areas affected should be demanded before accepting the document, even as a basis for consultation , notwithstanding receiving meaningful figures on the true cost, the savings, the educational value and the sustainability of the plan. Offering some form of language impact study next year will therefore be too late if the Council "accepts" the document. The governing clique is trying to sell a "cat in a bag" to councillors.

"Accepting" the document as a basis for consultation is synonymous to saying that this is the Council's strategy if it isn't persuaded otherwise. The presupposition each time will be in favour of the contents of the document that has been "accepted" The governing clique is therefore asking the ordinary councillors to accept a policy without any information about any of its main effects on their constituencies. Taking such a decision would be irresponsible and dangerous, and would most likely constitute maladministration.

Opposing this is a good opportunity for the ordinary councillors of Gwynedd to demand that they have a voice, not only on this matter but also for important matters in the future. This is the time to make a stand.

The whole of Wales may benefit from Gwynedd councillors taking a lead and demanding democracy and the fundamental right to represent their electors.

Thanks you for taking the time to read and consider the contents of this letter.

Yours faithfully,

On behalf of Achubwch Llanystumdwy.