

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LEARNING AND SKILLS SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE HELD AT BY ZOOM ON WEDNESDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2021**

PRESENT: County Councillor P Roberts (Chairman)  
County Councillors S C Davies, E Roderick, L Roberts, R G Thomas, J Berriman,  
A Jenner, C Mills.  
Co-Opted Members: S. Davies and M Evitts

Cabinet Portfolio Holders In Attendance: County Councillor A W Davies (Portfolio  
Holder for Finance and Transport)

Officers: Eurig Towns (Senior Challenge Advisor), Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager  
and Head of Democratic Services), Delyth Jones (Challenge Advisor), Emma Palmer  
(Head of Transformation and Communications) and Mari Thomas (Finance Manager).

<b>1. APOLOGIES</b>
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Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors B Davies, T Van-Rees, D Jones and from County Councillors K Roberts-Jones, D Meredith, M Williams and P Davies (Portfolio Holder for Education and Property) who left the meeting due to other Council business.

Apologies were also received from Lynette Lovell (Interim Chief Education Officer) and Geraint Rees (Education Consultant).

<b>2. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST</b>
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There were no declarations of interest from Members relating to items for consideration on the agenda.

<b>3. DECLARATIONS OF PARTY WHIP</b>
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The Committee did not receive any disclosures of prohibited party whips which a Member has been given in relation to the meeting in accordance with Section 78(3) of the Local Government Measure 2011.

<b>4. LLANFIHANGEL RHYDITHON CP SCHOOL</b>
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**Documents Considered:**

- Report of the Portfolio Holder for Education and Property – Llanfihangel Rhydithon C P School.

**Issues Discussed:**

- Consultation undertaken to close the school following the decision of the Cabinet. The Committee was asked to consider the proposal to be considered by the Cabinet.
- Questions:

During the consultation there was a change in the information around the	No Estyn have not been informed as this information came to light during
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<p>Cylch Meithrin at Dolau which is maintained. Was Estyn informed there was a Cylch Meithrin on the site and whether they responded to that.</p>	<p>the consultation.</p>
<p>In your opinion would this be likely to change their response.</p>	<p>Officers cannot comment on behalf of Estyn.</p>
<p>Concerned about the rigour around the process which has taken place.</p> <p>Have revisited the Cabinet paper in February and compared that to the current report. Also conscious about the WESP conversations which the Committee had recently.</p> <p>The report states that the review has been carried out in accordance with the rural schools code. What is concerning is the lack of demonstrable listening and subsequent modification of the recommendations as a result of the consultation which you might expect to see. The recommendations to Cabinet now are no different to those in February, so some may consider this as no more than a tick box exercise which we should be avoiding. We need to demonstrate that we are listening but substantiating the original proposals. Estyn's comments do not endorse the Council's approach and the Council should reflect on this. Should the Council be looking at some other options as there is no evidence of this in the paper. The Council is not considering options and then explaining this in the responses to consultation comments.</p> <p>The case for closure has a number of strands but it is unclear if they all are of equal weight or are some of greater significance in making the case. This could be explained in a clearer way.</p> <p>With regard to the shared leadership with Llanelwedd School this is a temporary arrangement which has</p>	<p>In terms of the comment about the lack of listening to the consultation, attached to the agenda is a 354 page consultation report where there are comments on every response and comment made during the consultation. Therefore, there has been consideration to each of the responses. However, consultation does not automatically mean that the end result will change. There can be amendments and there could be further consultation on a different proposal. Officers have given due time and consideration to all of the responses, as this is a very important matter.</p>

<p>been in ongoing for 6 years. One reason for closure is to give pupils the opportunity for a permanent head. Option 2 i.e. the status quo is the two schools working together. This does not consider the formalising of this position under federation.</p> <p>Figures for the costs may not be accurate and could officers clarify the savings of having a shared headteacher and the additional transport costs following closure. Therefore, what is the cost per pupil.</p> <p>Combined classes and delivery of the curriculum - schools have been invited to develop the new curriculum, but there is no independent evidence that combined classes and pupil challenge are detrimental.</p> <p>Other schools are at capacity and some are exceeding their capacity e.g. Llanbister when Crossgates has empty places.</p> <p>Concerns have been raised about the lack of clarity regarding Ysgol Calon Cymru, Builth and its feeder network. Officers agreed there are issues including the sufficiency of numbers of pupils learning in Welsh. Has the authority considered whether Llanfihangel Rhydithon could be converted to be a location for Welsh Medium provision for East Radnor or in federation with another school.</p> <p>Have noted responses against the comments made. Where does the Committee see the work done in considering the options. Just need to reflect on this for the future.</p>	
<p>What will be the financial impact on Llanelwedd of the changes in terms</p>	<p>Costs per pupil at Llanelwedd – if the proposal goes forward, the impact</p>

<p>of their costs per pupil. If you consider the Carno cluster they are 11 miles end to end. Llanelwedd to Llanfihangel Rhydithon is 14.5 miles end to end. Why is federation not being considered.</p>	<p>will be that headteacher of Llanelwedd would return to their substantive post. This will not affect the cost per pupil at Llanelwedd. There would be some impact on Llanelwedd's budget and spend.</p>
<p>Why is the change of Llanfihangel Rhydithon to become a Church in Wales school not a viable option which could assist federation with Llanelwedd.</p>	<p>A number of options were considered last year. Llanelwedd was not considered in the options for federation as federation is usually schools in the same vicinity i.e. the same geographical area. Carno and the other schools are neighbouring schools which is why they were considered.</p> <p>Federation came out of consultation as a potential option and this was assessed against the factors in the rural schools code For any proposal the authority has to make assessments taking into account the challenges facing Llanfihangel Rhydithon. When considering or reassessing options the authority has to consider whether alternative options will overcome these challenges.</p> <p>Federation is a legal term and is around the formal federation of schools with a single governing body. Legally a Church in Wales School and a Community Primary School cannot be federated. The only way to do this would be to merge the two schools and there are options to do this. This was assessed and the conclusion was that it would not address challenges faced by Llanfihangel Rhidithon.</p>
<p>Welsh Language - concerned about the responses in respect of the Welsh Language. This needs to be taken into context with the WESP agreed by Cabinet and the aspiration to establish a Welsh Medium primary school in East Radnor. There is a Cylch Meithrin on site at Llanfihangel Rhydithon which seems to have a throughflow of 10 to 15 pupils per</p>	<p>There is a Cylch Methrin which was established in 2019 with about 12 pupils. It also provides child care for pre-school pupils from age 2 onwards. The Cylch Meithrin operates from the school site and the Council has given funding to refurbish the demountable building. It is the view of officers that there would be an impact on the Cylch</p>

<p>year. The responses to comments seem to miss that there is more immersion in the school than appears to be taking place, and that the school is an English Medium School.</p>	<p>Meithrin should parents chose to have child care at another setting. The Cylch Meithrin could continue to operate from Llanfihangel Rhydithon if there was demand. If the school closed then assets could be removed but the Council could discuss with Cylch Meithrin about continuing use of the demountable. There is a concern that in Llanfihangel Rhydithon there is no continuation from pre-school into Welsh Medium provision. It is an English Medium School but Welsh is taught at the school With regard to the sabbatical, three members of staff from the school have attended the sabbatical. The sabbatical is also available virtually and there are staff from neighbouring schools also attending the sabbatical. There is an expectation that all schools develop staff for the Welsh Language and there is a big push on normalising the language and developing staff.</p>
<p>The WESP recognises the need to develop a Welsh Medium primary school in East Radnor. Is this an opportunity to build on what is currently present in the community to meet the aspiration of the WESP, utilising this school. How many pupils currently going to the Welsh Stream at Ysgol Trefonnen might come to Llanfihangel Rhydithon if it was designated a Welsh Medium school or had a bilingual stream. There is nothing in the report to say this is not an option.</p>	<p>With Welsh Medium education the Cabinet has approved the WESP. However, we have a small school in Llanfihangel Rhydithon with a small capacity. If you start to split the school by language this would exacerbate the position for a small school which is why a dual stream option was not considered. The Council would need to make sure the provision of Welsh Medium education is continued from early years to primary and with small numbers it would take a long time to achieve this and would not be an appropriate solution to overcome the challenges at Llanfihangel Rhydithon.</p>
<p>In the impact assessment the impact on Welsh Language is neutral but there is a risk to the Cylch Meithrin. How can this be neutral if Welsh Medium provision in the area is under threat</p>	<p>Its neutral as Welsh Medium provision could continue and it is acknowledged there is a risk. There is continuation of Welsh Medium provision in Llandrindod at Ysgol Trefonnen if parents wanted to continue their children's Welsh</p>

	<p>Medium education.</p> <p>If pupils transfer from Cylch Meithrin into Llanfihangel Rhydithon school this is not a continuation of their Welsh Medium education as the school is an English Medium school. The Welsh Medium provision is in Llandrindod which is why the assessment is neutral.</p>
<p>Ysgol Trefonnen does not have the capacity at present for any pupils to transfer in. What are we going to do about Welsh Medium provision in East Radnor. Although the numbers may be small and this would be too hard, where would it be easy.</p>	<p>When the authority plans the development of Welsh Medium provision it is necessary look at where the critical mass is. Critical mass is usually in towns and there is a need for numbers to flow into these centres. Would look at needs elsewhere if there was sufficient demand.</p>
<p>We will have to sort out issue of Welsh Medium in East Radnor as Council wants to increase numbers. It is also difficult to establish streams on the border as there is potential leakage of pupils across the border.</p>	<p>The Council has to ensure equity across the county and we do not have that in any language currently. Previous discussions were about learner entitlement on a reduced infrastructure. There are critical paths to be followed to unlock the change to progress transformation. There are a number of other schools in the area that can provide the quality of education in this area and the status quo is not sustainable.</p>
<p>Llanbister School is at capacity. Why is there no option to combine this school with Llanbister. Why is this school being looked at in isolation.</p>	<p>They were considered together in 2016, but there were not enough spaces for pupils to go to. Llanbister's numbers have doubled in the last three or four years so it is now over capacity. This year a third classroom has been added so there is capacity there now should Llanfihangel Rhydithon School close. Federation and merging with Llanbister was considered, but considering the challenges for Llanfihangel Rhydithon, a merger with Llanbister would not address these.</p>
<p>Crossgates has a capacity of 210. If the 35 from Llanfihangel Rhydithon move there it would leave only 44</p>	<p>The capacity of Crossgates is 210. They have 84 surplus places which could easily accommodate the pupils</p>

<p>spare spaces. Surplus places could be taken up quickly.</p>	<p>from Llanfihangel Rhydithon. 1 class is used as an ALN satellite centre, so this reduces the capacity to 180 i.e. 54 surplus places. Therefore, Crossgates has sufficient capacity for Llanfihangel Rhydithon pupils should they chose to go there. Some pupils are closer to Llanbister, Knighton and other schools so it is likely that not all pupils will go to one school. If any school is over subscribed then the admissions policy kicks in.</p>
<p>Looking at the figures for the possible schools where pupils could transfer to, 8 have classes or year groups are over 30 pupils. Are these children educated in classes over 30 or are they in split age classes in those schools.</p> <p>At Crossgates school in Years 4,5,6 there are 57 pupils spread over 2 mixed age classes. If Llanfihangel Rhydithon children go there then those classes would go over 30 and there would need to split them into three single age classes. There is also a need to build in ALN provision which would take out a classroom. Is there capacity in the building, and would they need additional teacher. How much capacity would the school have as surplus.</p>	<p>Regarding the class structure at Crossgates, school leaders will always adapt class structures to meet fluctuating pupil numbers and the needs of learners. There are seven classrooms in Crossgates, all aligned to the minimum requirement of thirty. Five are currently used and one for an ALN satellite centre which is a pilot. It would be a governing body decision on how class sizes are structured and additional pupils would lead to additional funding for an additional teacher if needed.</p>
<p>How many pupils would need to transfer into Crossgates to move up a step and get funding for an additional teacher.</p>	<p>Currently the school has 126 pupils. The next step up is 150 so and additional 28. The proposal includes additional funding for Crossgates under the formula.</p> <p>Modelling cannot pre-empt where children will transfer to, but estimates are undertaken. Schools consider pupil numbers on an annual basis and make adjustments accordingly as pupil numbers change.</p>
<p>The other eight schools who currently have classes of over 30 pupils. The argument in the document is not to have mixed age</p>	<p>Llanbister is split into three classes of mixed age groups. Trefonnen and Cefnlllys Schools in Llandrindod have mixed age classes but maybe of one</p>

<p>classes. Are these classes running at over 30 or are there mixed aged groups. How many of those 8 are mixed age groups.</p>	<p>or two years only. Llanfihangel Rhydithon has two classes with four age groups. It is easier to plan with two age ranges in a class rather than four age ranges in a class.</p>
<p>In relation to the wider catchment and growth in population due to building developments. It is stated that these will be dealt with in a wider review of the catchment as part of the Ysgol Calon Cymru review. If there are potential pressures from new development, does not that review override this proposal as the authority could be removing capacity which may be needed in future.</p>	<p>The authority has been looking at demography and population projections and whilst there may be some population increase in parts, the prediction is for a population decrease. There is currently surplus capacity in the area. What is not known is the impact of the pandemic on inward migration into the county. However, we cannot wait for that and need to act on the available data. The school population five years ago was 20,000 pupils and is now down to 16,500 and will reduce further.</p>
<p>A wider catchment review is now in place that was announced when the consultation on this proposal was being issued so it is difficult to say that all avenues have been explored to keep this school open when the entire catchment is being reviewed and that review may highlight other options.</p>	<p>The authority does need to work through the complexities of Ysgol Calon Cymru and as part of that all stakeholders would be engaged. This engagement will be essential to also understand the primary provision in this area. There are still a significant number of schools in the areas with surplus capacity, but we have to progress proposals.</p> <p>There is a vision for Ysgol Calon Cymru. However, the authority is not running an area catchment review in parallel with this proposal. We will need to reach a conclusion about Ysgol Calon Cymru before we look at the wider primary provision in the area. Inequity and improving learner entitlement needs to be addressed as soon as possible and we cannot afford to wait.</p>
<p>The document states that pupil projections do not take into account housing developments. It also states that the next phase of the Ysgol Calon Cymru will review pupil numbers in all phases. So is there a danger of additional places needing to be found where pupils from</p>	<p>We will be considering the overall pupil numbers as part of a future area review.</p>

<p>elsewhere need to be decanted from schools which are currently over capacity.</p>	
<p>Why is there a surplus and does Powys claw it back.                  Transport – a closure of the school will lead to increased costs. The Council's position is that these increased costs would be negligible. In the SWAT analysis it states that if this school and another were closed and merged on another site there would be additional transport costs. Why is that different.                  The Council also needs to be flexible on its school transport policy in future if this school is closed.                   Should surpluses be included in the formula when looking at costs per pupil. If there is a regular surplus should this be clawed back and if there is a regular surplus does the formula need to be adapted.</p>	<p>We do not claw back surpluses. The formula review showed that smaller schools fared well and there have been minor adjustments to the formula. The formula is now subject to a further review.                   In relation to the school's surplus, the funding does allow for a school to have its own headteacher. As the role is shared there is some saving there resulting in the surplus. As funding is delegated there is no clawback unless there is a significant surplus and certain conditions apply. The current formula was introduced to provide stability to the small schools which it has achieved.</p>
<p>Small schools and the new curriculum. The new curriculum encourages ability based learning rather than based on age. Is the position in Llanfihangel Rhydithon better for the delivery of the new curriculum as pupils taught with those with different abilities rather than within an age group. Does mixed classes better fit the delivery of the curriculum.</p>	<p>The scenario provided is still grouping children into ability ranges. If you have a four age range in a class this gives a much wider range of abilities and ages which places more burdens on class teachers. This comes back to effective teaching and the quality of learning. In a smaller school this is more difficult to achieve and puts an additional pressure and workload on teachers. The new curriculum has six core areas and this provides more pressure on two teacher schools, to ensure all pupils are challenged and meet the six core areas.</p>
<p>Estyn states that Llanfihangel Rhydithon is meeting the needs of the new curriculum.</p>	<p>All schools are moving and progressing towards the new curriculum but not meeting it in full as yet as the whole curriculum has not been released, e.g. assessments.</p>
<p>How do you balance the view from civil servants that the new curriculum</p>	<p>The new curriculum is challenging for all schools. In two teacher</p>

<p>has been developed for all schools in Powys.</p>	<p>schools they are responsible for the challenges and it is greater for them than in a larger school. It is more difficult in a small school and the additional workload will put pressure on teachers.</p> <p>We do concur with the Minister, but the Minister was responding to a question that he could not see why rural schools could not deliver the curriculum. Rural schools can deliver the curriculum, but the challenge is in the very small schools.</p>
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- Comments:
- There is no evidence in document that there is the potential to establish a Welsh Medium school at Llanfihangel Rhydithon.
- Mixed age groups is not a bad thing as peer support is essential. Do not see how this argument stands in the proposal.
- Could do with evidence that children fare better with less year groups in a class. This should be included in the report.

**Outcomes:**

**Scrutiny made the following observations:**

- The Committee was satisfied that the majority of the arguments set out in the document were justified on all grounds, with the exception of those in relation to federation and Welsh Language.
- The Committee considered that prior to the Cabinet taking a decision in relation to the proposal that the following areas be more fully explored and detailed in the report to Cabinet, as the Committee was not assured that the current proposal meets the requirements of the rural schools policy in respect of:
  - the opportunity for federating this school with another larger school.
  - the opportunity to move the school from an English Medium School to either a Dual Stream or Welsh Medium School and meet the aspiration of the WESP for a Welsh Medium Primary School in Mid Powys (East).
- The Committee suggested that the following additional information would have been of assistance in considering the report and would be of assistance to the Cabinet:
  - evidence or available research about the benefits of one or two year mixed age classes v the dis-benefits of multi-year mixed age classes, as this is a core argument for school transformation proposals and would assist future debates about individual proposals.
  - further evidence to support the rationale, why options were considered and accepted or rejected, or statements made in the report. This information is provided in response to questions and it would assist if it was available in the report.
  - the numbers from within and outside the school's catchment that are attending the school under review, and the same information for potential receiving schools.

- The Committee suggested:
  - that the school transport policy would need to be reviewed to take account of transformation proposals so that parental choice was not being limited by the authority's transport policy.
  - that should the school close, the authority would need to consider what support it could provide to retain the Cylch Meithrin currently on the school site.

**Scrutiny's Recommendations to Cabinet:**

**1 That the following matters be more fully explored prior to consideration by Cabinet:**

- **Federation;**
- **Moving the school to a Welsh Medium School**

**2 That the inclusion of additional information in proposal reports as set out above be approved.**

**County Councillor P Roberts (Chairman)**