

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL

**County Council
21st October 2015**

REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Arwel Jones, Portfolio Holder for Education

SUBJECT: Question from County Councillor John Morris

In January and March of this year we were informed that the cabinet were introducing a secondary school's modernisation policy for Powys that would address the overspend in schools delegated budgets in the immediate future and offer a good range of educational opportunities to all our secondary school aged pupils.

Following the recent debate at cabinet it now appears that there have been fundamental changes to this policy approach that may put at risk the whole future direction of all secondary schools in Powys.

It now appears that there is no perceivable direction, timescale or costings and no identifiable secondary modernisation policy in existence in Powys. This has caused a great deal of concern for schools and parents alike.

Please can you inform us of the present status and timescale of the secondary schools modernisation policy with particular reference to how you intend to finance the present model in the interim and how you intend to safeguard and improve levels of performance of our secondary school pupils in the light of the severe cuts to school budgets proposed?

I can assure you that there is clear Programme Plan for the Secondary Reorganisation Programme. Whilst I acknowledge that there has been some slippage in the Programme's timescales for consideration of the outcome of reviews by Cabinet, these do not affect the overall timescales that would be required for any structural change to take place. You will also be aware that this a very legally complex area of work, and the Authority needs to take the appropriate time to ensure due process is followed at the early stages, to avoid further delays at a later stage.

An update for each of the priorities is outlined below:

Priority 1: Beacons Learning Campus. The strategic outline case was approved by Welsh Government in May 2015 and the Authority has been requested to develop an outline business case, the next stage of the process under 21st Schools Programme. However, in order to be completely policy compliant and avoid future legal challenges, the project is currently at a 'pause and review' stage. The original proposal to close Gwernyfed and Brecon High Schools by September 2017 is currently being reviewed alongside a range of other options, in accordance with Stage 2 of the School Review Process in the School Transformation Policy 2014.

This stage will be completed over the next few months, and a new recommendation will be put before Cabinet at the end of the year. Formal consultation (dependent on the recommendation agreed) will take place in Spring Term 2016 with a final decision to be made by July 2016. The earliest any structural/organisational change could happen will be September 2017 – this is exactly the same timescale as originally proposed.

Following completion of this stage of the process, an outline business case will be submitted to Welsh Government, reflecting the new recommendation, without prejudice to the outcome of any formal consultation, so that we are able to secure the much-needed capital funding.

Priority 2: Mid Powys Review. All options for Llandrindod and Builth High Schools are currently being reviewed, in accordance with Stage 2 of the School Review Process in the School Transformation Policy 2014. This stage will be completed over the next few months, and a new recommendation will be put before Cabinet at the end of the year. Formal consultation (dependent on the recommendation agreed) will take place in Spring Term 2016, with a final decision to be made by July 2016. The earliest any structural/organisational change could happen will be September 2017.

Welsh Medium Brecon High School – formal consultation to remove Welsh Medium from Brecon from September 2016 has concluded, and a consultation report has been published. This will be now be considered alongside the current reviews of Priority 1 and 2.

Priority 3 – Review of Sixth Form Maesydderwen – completed.

Priority 4 – Review of secondary education in North Powys, with a focus on Welsh Medium/dual-stream provision. First stage of the review – to assess the feasibility of establishing a Category 2a school or schools has been completed by September, as originally agreed. The next stage will be to develop a detailed business case for consideration in the Spring which will not be prejudicial towards a Category 2a school, but will state all the facts and costs of such a school, within the overall funding available to Powys. Dependent on the outcome of this business case, a further review of secondary school configuration in the North will commence. We have always stated that this review, being on a larger and more complex scale than the Mid and South, will take longer to achieve.

It is important that this Programme is taken forward in a manageable way, with realistic timescales. I am confident that my officers will achieve these deadlines.

In terms of Post-16, whilst there are no structural changes yet to sixth forms, the Authority recommends that the collaborative model continues as this offers all learners the widest range of opportunities. I recognise that the model is not ideal, and that we are facing further reductions in funding from Welsh Government – I will ask my officers to give further consideration to the current situation in light of the financial/curricular challenges that we are facing.

The medium term financial plan being considered by the authority for the three years commencing April 2016 provides an element of protection to the Schools delegated budget, with no across the board cut being applied, but with school having to absorb pay and price increases from the current level of overall funding. As members will be aware Post 16 funding is provided to schools via the authority through a Grant provided by the Welsh Government, early indications for this grant suggests that there will be a reduction in the level of Grant available to the authority and this combined with the pay and price increases will place further pressure on this area of the schools budget. The authority has successfully operated for the last few years, two joint curriculum planning and delivery groups in the North and South of the county and the current funding methodology is currently being reviewed by a joint Officer and Schools working group. Any proposed changes will form part of proposals on the authority's fair funding formula, that will be consulted upon prior to Christmas.