



## CONSULTATION REPORT

### Plans for Powys Schools – Vision 2025

#### 1. Background

The council's draft Plans for Powys Schools policy was approved by Cabinet on the 7th November 2017. Subsequently, consultation was carried out on the draft policy from the 21<sup>st</sup> November 2017 until the 30<sup>th</sup> January 2018.

A link to the draft document was distributed to a range of stakeholders, including schools, governing bodies and town and community councils. Respondents could either respond to the consultation via an online response form, or by submitting written responses to the Schools Transformation Team either via e-mail or in writing.

In addition, 3 'drop-in' sessions were held to provide the opportunity for stakeholders to discuss the policy with officers from the Schools Transformation Team. These sessions were held in Brecon, Llandrindod Wells and Newtown. Officers also attended meetings of the Governors Consultative Committee and the Schools Forum.

#### 2. Responses received

A total of 91 written responses were received. 77 responses were via the online questionnaire, along with 14 other written responses.

Responses were received from a wide range of stakeholders including parents, governors, county councillors, town / community councils and members of staff at Powys schools, and from a range of different geographical areas.

#### 3. Feedback received

##### 3.1 Online questionnaire

The online questionnaire asked respondents to provide feedback on each of the 4 sections of the consultation document, and to provide any additional comments. The feedback received for each section is summarised below:

##### Section 3 – Our Aims

Respondents were asked to state to what extent they agreed that the aims outlined in the policy were the right aims, where 1 = Totally Disagree and 5 = Totally Agree. The average score was **3.79**.

Respondents were also asked to suggest how the aims could be improved. The main points raised are outlined below:

- Develop the use of new technologies
- Develop a more flexible teaching workforce
- Develop a long term stable financial framework for schools
- Ensure school buildings are well maintained
- Queries relating to the commitment to increasing demand for Welsh-medium education
- Pupils should be taught in reasonable sized classes, preferably of only two year groups
- Any partnerships have to be logical and practical in terms of geography
- Need to provide sufficient funding to schools to achieve the aims – should add an aim re finance e.g. 'is adequately financed and resourced to achieve the main aims'
- To ensure schools have the right equipment and enough funding
- Allow schools the flexibility to develop marketing and compete for pupils in order to be successful and drive up standards
- There are too many schools in Powys, and the schools that we have are underfunded
- Sustained access to local school provision
- To achieve excellence in local sixth form provision
- The council should listen to its schools
- Need to ensure robust management of school budgets
- Concern about whether partnership working is feasible with the distances involved
- Need greater equality for those with protected characteristics
- Need to support the well-being of pupils to ensure that all learners feel safe
- Unsure about sharing headteachers – there are examples where this hasn't been successful

#### **Section 4 – How We Will Achieve This / Guiding Principles**

Respondents were asked to state to what extent they agreed that the guiding principles outlined in the policy were the right ones, where 1 = Totally Disagree and 5 = Totally Agree. The average score was **3.27**.

Respondents were also asked to suggest how this section could be improved. The suggestions made are summarised below:

- Should be an aim that all schools are in condition A/B buildings, not just special schools
- Develop a long term stable financial framework for all schools
- Include the potential for shared 'back office' functions e.g. business managers
- Need to develop Welsh-medium provision in the secondary sector
- Not necessarily true in all cases that all-through, multi-sited and federated models will improve the current system and deliver the aims
- Concern about the impact on governors
- One of the guiding principles should be 'can we afford it'?
- Multi-site secondary schools gives more responsibility to a smaller group of leaders
- Concern about the impact of more Welsh-medium education on English-medium education
- Very small schools of under 30 pupils should be closed

- Seems clear that there will have to be some school closures – is the political will there?
- Unclear to Infants Schools how creating all-through primaries would improve opportunities for pupils
- Over reliance on collaboration – the Council should take the lead
- Unsure whether the plans will produce enough savings to allow adequate overall funding of all schools
- As a minimum, should change wording to read ‘all secondary schools...’ and ‘all small primary schools...’
- Concern about the suggestion that governing bodies will be expected to take the lead – this is likely to overstretch governors, who are volunteers
- Important that the council is open and transparent in its communication with communities
- What would define a best solution?
- Concern about focus on ‘creating demand’ for Welsh-medium provision
- The council should look at closing very small schools with less than 50 pupils to save money
- Establish more Welsh streams in the primary sector to feed Welsh-medium secondary provision
- Develop the use of technology to improve standards, eg delivering sixth form lessons to multiple sites by video
- Concern about post-16 learners having to travel several hours a day
- Don’t like the idea of ‘super-schools’
- Ensure that impact assessments apply through formal consultation, to publicise the outcomes of consultations and use this to inform Cabinet decisions
- The principles are centred around saving money not the benefit of pupils
- Not all about size – small schools can be efficient and produce excellent results
- Is there evidence that all through schools are more effective?
- Powys is behind the times re Welsh medium provision in comparison to other authorities
- All decisions and resources should be devolved to schools
- Concern about closing schools in order to merge them – learners who have to travel are at a disadvantage due to the longer day
- Concern about implications of collaboration / shared headteacher arrangements on schools
- Do more to attract business to set up in the area
- The council should start looking at multi sited models of education with more pace
- Haven’t seen any sound evidence that backs the all-through model – there are mixed results across Wales, it shouldn’t be seen as a solution for all.

### **Section 5 – Key Considerations**

Respondents were asked to state to what extent they agreed that the key considerations outlined in the policy were the right ones, where 1 = Totally Disagree and 5 = Totally Agree. The average score was **3.70**.

Respondents were also asked to suggest how this section could be improved. The suggestions made are summarised below:

- Develop a long term stable financial framework for all schools
- Ensure all centrally provided support services improve and become more efficient

- Should mention education and it's quality and accessibility
- Leadership could include recruitment and retention
- Need more recognition of post 16 issues
- Would like the considerations to be in priority – would guess finance would be at the top – need to provide the best education for our children that we can afford
- Demography is a critical factor for long term planning, such as this
- The Council needs to make decisions from a county wide perspective
- Need to add reference to use of internet and digital learning
- More emphasis on providing training opportunities for future leaders
- Collaborative working should be encouraged, but doubt that this will provide the financial efficiency needed to sustain the current education model in Powys
- Concern about headteachers overseeing schools in different clusters that are miles apart and have several schools in between
- Need to be open with parents and the public
- Transport is a key consideration
- Concern about impact on the workload of school leaders
- Concern about the definition of a 'small school' as a school with less than 91 pupils
- Concern about very large schools – staff can't get to know children as well
- Close schools with less than 50 pupils as they are not viable
- Re-organise Welsh-medium secondary provision – current providers in north Powys are too close to each other
- Include a maximum journey time for pupils
- Larger schools are not necessarily better
- You talk about negatives in relation to small schools but there are positives too
- Need more focus on financial resources and leadership
- Breakfast and after school clubs should be a focus for working parents
- Well-being of staff that have to deliver has been overlooked
- Small schools should not have safeguarded positions/budgets with regards to funding – they must be financially viable and funded as per larger schools

### **Section 6 – Work Programme**

Respondents were asked to state to what extent they agreed that the approach outlined for agreeing a work programme was the right approach, where 1 = Totally Disagree and 5 = Totally Agree. The average score was **3.33**.

Respondents were also asked to suggest how this section could be improved. The suggestions made are summarised below:

- Needs to be clear how requests from governing bodies will be included in the work plan
- Need for leadership role from local authority rather than leaving this up to individual schools
- Viable post-16 education should feature on this list
- The work programme sounds more reactive than proactive
- Concern about the ability of schools with tiny numbers of pupils to deliver an appropriate education
- A flexible approach could lead to inconsistencies across the county – could one area lag behind another because it lacks the local initiative and skills to look at alternatives?
- Governing bodies shouldn't be expected to lead the engagement with communities

- How will an increased workload for a smaller workforce be avoided?
- WG definition of a small school does not take into account the size of Powys
- Will schools who do not wish to amalgamate / federate be able to make that choice, or will that autonomy be removed?
- Working with and listening to schools is key
- No reference to addressing deficit budgets
- Consultation should be about listening – Powys never seem to listen
- How is having one headteacher for two schools better than having two headteachers for two schools?

### **Other comments**

Respondents were also asked to provide any additional comments on the draft policy. The comments received are summarised below:

- Seems to be no strategy to achieve a long term stable framework to finance all schools in Powys
- Need a stronger commitment to more meaningful dialogue with and support for school governors
- There have been too many consultations using in-house and external consultancies, the process takes too long and the council avoids implementation
- Budget pressures are having an impact on education
- If the remit of headteachers expands e.g. through federation, they will need support e.g. through the appointment of a business manager
- Individual communities do not always see the 'bigger picture' – the LA may need to make difficult decisions in the face of opposition
- Prioritisation of Welsh-medium needs to happen in conjunction with a clear strategy for English-medium which will face pressure as places in Welsh-medium increase
- Document lacks many details – schools want to know what's in it for them
- Difficult to believe the Council can make significant budget savings by increased inter-school collaboration
- There are too many secondary school sites in Powys, which due to small numbers in year groups limits choices at key stage 4 and post 16
- Pace and scale of change by the council does not appear to be quick enough
- School balances are projected to decline, and the document does not clearly set out and commit to how it will deliver a high quality education system that is affordable and sustainable in the long term
- Pleasing to see the acknowledgement of the importance of rural schools in rural communities
- Real action needed to improve post-16 provision – having to attend multiple school sites is having a negative impact on pupils' experience of sixth form
- Need to do more to encourage great teachers to work and live in Powys
- The council is inflicting too much pressure on schools
- The council needs to address some of the runaway budgets of schools that are being allowed to continue
- Give the schools the money and resources they need to provide a decent learning environment

### 3.2 Other written responses

14 other written responses were received. These responses vary greatly in length and level of detail, however the main issues raised in each response are summarised below:

Number	Issues raised
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reference to typing error</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Need for additional support for Welsh-medium schools for translation services</li> <li>- Need to review SEN provision</li> <li>- Need additional investment in ICT provision</li> <li>- Concern that individual headteachers determine which pupil performance tracking systems they use</li> <li>- Support colocation of council services to schools</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Request for list of rural schools</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support ambition to increase Welsh-medium provision</li> <li>- Pleased to see reference to the role schools play in their communities</li> <li>- In developing new infrastructure, the council has an opportunity to entrench the principles of collaboration by ensuring spaces are appropriately designed and secured by stipulating shared usage at the initial phases</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unclear in the document what the step change referred to actually is</li> <li>- Introduction does not mention the main challenge facing the council – the continuing reduction in financial resources available to schools</li> <li>- Some important issues that were mentioned in the 2015 policy which aren't included here</li> <li>- Not clear what the rationale is for moving towards more collaboration and joint working</li> <li>- Need to be clear that headteachers who take responsibility for more than one school will be properly supported</li> <li>- Should be clear that collaboration should normally be between schools in close proximity to each other so that as little travelling time as possible is involved</li> <li>- Effective collaboration will require teachers, governors, councillors and parents to be open to a less parochial approach</li> <li>- Proposal to create demand by increasing Welsh medium places needs to be explained and justified in more detail</li> <li>- Document does not set out an aspiration for school size which were included in the 2015 policy – are these aspirations no longer part of the Council's guiding principles?</li> <li>- Would like more detail on the Council's plans for post-16 provision</li> <li>- Impression given is that the approach to school reorganisation will be rather laissez faire with an emphasis on schools to come forward with proposals. However, local communities do not always see the bigger picture – the Council is in the best position to take the wider view.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Will be important for the Director of Education to consult with various representative bodies of headteachers and governors before agreeing the work programme with the portfolio holder</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Broadly satisfied with the general thrust of the document, but find much of the content to be rather vague and general in nature</li> <li>- Lack of any remarks addressing provision for pupils with special learning needs – this appears a major omission</li> <li>- Concern about the heavy-handed implementation of the Welsh Government's Welsh Language policy</li> </ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Welcome statements relating to schools engaging with residents, being involved within community life and school sites being used by the community for services other than education.</li> <li>- Document does not cover how the Council will maximise its aspiration and successfully achieve such activities in communities</li> </ul>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Key driver seems to be reducing cost not improving education for children</li> <li>- Parents and governing bodies will likely want to know what the policy means for them in reality – this is unclear</li> </ul>
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Council must have an aim to provide adequate funding for its schools</li> <li>- Some mention must be made of developing digital learning / use of the internet</li> </ul>
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support for the commitment to increasing demand for Welsh-medium education</li> <li>- Would like to see an acknowledgement of the importance of clear progression from pre-school settings to primary to secondary and post-16</li> </ul>
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Agree with the vision set out in section 2 and pleased to note the commitment to engaging with residents and communities and to promoting stronger partnership working</li> <li>- Reference to secondary schools already working collaboratively in a number of areas with other secondary schools and feeder primary schools</li> <li>- Reasonable travel time is more important a consideration than reasonable distance – would urge the Council to look again at this</li> </ul>
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- While a 'one size fits all' may not be appropriate, concerned that too many bespoke solutions may limit Powys' ability to effectively support the new landscape. Some models may be better than others, e.g. school federations do not necessarily provide significant financial savings</li> <li>- What lessons have been learned from existing multi-site, all-through and federated schools?</li> <li>- What cost benefits have been documented from existing collaborations?</li> <li>- What incentives can be supplied to expediate school partnerships?</li> <li>- To what extent have technology solutions been considered?</li> <li>- Concern about whether the plan will lead to significant efficiency gains</li> </ul>

13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The Council needs to accept that meeting the needs of Welsh-medium pupils means designated schools</li><li>- What does 'strong and attractive post-16 provision' mean for Welsh-medium pupils?</li><li>- Reluctance to reorganise educational provision to address falling pupil numbers shows that the authority is avoiding its responsibility</li></ul>
14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Need to ensure that you listen to the pupil voice</li></ul>