

**CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CABINET REPORT  
FOR PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION  
3<sup>rd</sup> January 2012**

**REPORT AUTHOR:** Gareth Jones  
Senior Manager, Central Services

**SUBJECT:** Closure of Cwmdu Church in Wales (Aided) School

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**REPORT FOR:** Decision

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**Summary**

Following a review of small schools in Powys earlier in 2011 by the Council's Learning in the Community Programme Board, on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2011 the Council's Cabinet approved the commencement of a consultation process to close Cwmdu C In W (A) School.

In September 2011 there were 21 pupils at the school; at the start of the Spring Term 2012, it is anticipated that there will be 19 pupils.

The financial costings and potential savings from closure of the school are shown at Appendix A and are approximately £100,000 per annum. The cost per pupil at the school is £5,852, 38% higher than the county average.

A consultation meeting with staff, governors and the community was held on 21st September where the proposal was explained; this included a timetable suggesting that the school could be formally closed by summer 2012.

The consultation period for comments to be received on the proposal ran from 19<sup>th</sup> September to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2011. 22 comments on the proposal were received during this period.

On 14<sup>th</sup> November 2011, the Portfolio Holder for Learning and Leisure agreed to the publication of a statutory notice for closure of Cwmdu C in W (A) School. This statutory notice was posted at the school gates, in a local newspaper and at other prominent places in the community (as required by legislation) on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2011 with the closing date for objections being 24<sup>th</sup> December.

One objection to the statutory notice was received by the closing date as follows:

**Objection (in full)**

*I wish to object to the closure of Cwmdu Church in Wales School.*

*The reason for my objection is because is because of the detrimental impact on the local community. The community impact assessment noted: "It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the closure of Cwmdu C in W School will have some impact on the local community through the loss of a centre of education for its young people and as an informal meeting place."*

### Proposed council comment:

*The council acknowledges through the Community Impact Assessment that there will be some impact on the village of Cwmdu if the school closes. The school plays an active part in the local Eisteddfod and in the Cwmdu Show. However it is not the only community facility in the village; there is a public house, a church, a tea room and a village hall which are likely to continue as the main places for social gatherings in the village. There will be the loss of a local informal meeting place if the school closes but the school buildings themselves are not used very much for community functions beyond normal school activities like the school play and sports day. To summarise, the council believes that the closure of the school will not have a unacceptably detrimental impact on the local community as there are other facilities available locally.*

This objection and the council's comment need to be forwarded to the Welsh Government by 7<sup>th</sup> January 2012 because the decision on the closure of the school (now that at least one objection has been received) will need to be made by the Minister for Education and Skills.

### **Proposal**

To agree the comments on the objection received and send it to the Welsh Government by 7<sup>th</sup> January 2012.

### **Corporate Improvement Plan**

A priority of the Corporate Improvement Plan is to provide high quality educational opportunities for all and this priority has been encompassed within the Learning in the Community improvement priority of the Powys Change Programme. The proposals within this paper will also help to meet the efficiency priority targets within the Plan. Any recommendations to consult on the closure of schools will, if implemented, support the priorities for the Schools Service contained in the Plan.

### **Options Considered/Available**

Now that a statutory notice has been published and an objection received, the Council has no option but to comment on them and forward them to the Welsh Government.

### **Preferred Choice and Reasons**

The Council must forward the objection received and its comments on it to the Welsh Government in order to comply with legislation.

### **Sustainability and Environmental Issues/Equalities/Crime and Disorder,/Welsh Language/Other Policies etc**

Where small schools are proposed for closure there will be some increase in travel and therefore carbon emissions.

The proposals are not anticipated to impact on any vulnerable or minority groups; an equality impact assessment has been undertaken.

School closure proposals will have an impact on the services available in rural communities but the savings generated will help to maintain and improve services for the whole of the community of Powys.

### **Children and Young People's Impact Statement - Safeguarding and Wellbeing**

The best interests of young people in these small schools will be safeguarded at all times particularly during this uncertain period of review. In the case of small schools that will be

closing, every effort will be made to ensure a smooth transition to new schools and safe and efficient transport to their new locations.

### **Local Member(s)**

The local member Councillor Kathryn Silk has commented as follows:

“To view Cwmdy School simply as a building whose closure will have a negative impact on the community is to miss the point entirely. The school is not the building, it is the lifeblood of the community. The LEA response to the objection suggests that the school buildings are underused and other meeting places in the village will fulfil the same function. The fact is that it is the school which sustains a range of other facilities including the Church and the village hall as so many of its activities are centred around those buildings. It is the energy and enthusiasm of pupils, parents and staff at the school that breathes life into the wider community making this village one of the most vibrant and socially integrated in the locality.

Supporters of the school have previously commented on the valuable role the school plays in offering a mainstream education to children who have not thrived in bigger schools locally, and I would wish to endorse that view. The school has been particularly successful in providing support - at a cost significantly below that of providing complementary education - to many children with a range of problems who have subsequently been able to transfer to high school with a sense of self-confidence and achievement.

It is also worth noting that the school plays a key role in ensuring that the Welsh identity remains strong in what is otherwise an anglicised corner of Powys. The original school in Cwmdy was founded by the Revd Thomas Price, Carnhaunawc, the founder of the modern eisteddfod movement. The school's pupils are central to the success, or continued existence even, of Cwmdy Eisteddfod and the maintenance of Welsh cultural heritage.

Finally, governors have had concerns about the LEA's procedures in relation to proposals for the school. A leaked confidential decision from the School's Modernisation Board in January 2011 to proceed with informal consultation on the future of the school meant that parents and prospective parents were concerned as to the future of the school even before the Cabinet decision to proceed with formal consultation. Furthermore governors learned that prior to the period of informal consultation LEA officers had already been signposting parents away from the school, effectively prejudging the outcome of a consultation process that had not even begun. The governors believe that the Welsh Government should satisfy itself that due process has been followed before deciding the future of Cwmdy School.”

### **Other Front Line Services**

No implications identified.

### **Support Services (Legal, Finance, HR, ICT, BPU)**

The Principal Accountant has been fully involved with the costings of the proposed closure of this school and confirms the savings identified are accurate based on the assumptions made in the report

Legal - There are no legal implications at this stage.

### **Local Service Board/Partnerships/Stakeholders etc**

No implications identified.

### **Statutory Officers**

The Strategic Director, Law & Governance (Monitoring Officer) has commented:-  
The proposals need to follow the normal procedures for school closure and advice from Legal Services obtained as necessary.

The Strategic Director, Finance & Infrastructure (Section 151 Officer) has commented:-  
I note that the Principal Accountant has agreed the financial data used in the report and would support the recommendation of the report.

### **Members' Interests**

The Monitoring Officer is not aware of any specific interests that may arise in relation to this report.

### **Future Status of the Report**

The portfolio holder is invited to consider the future status of this report and whether it can be made available to the press and public either immediately following the meeting or at some specified point in the future.

<b>Recommendation:</b>	<b>Reason for Recommendation:</b>
<b>To forward the objection received to the statutory notice for Cwmdu C in W (A) School and the council's comment on it to the Welsh Government by 7<sup>th</sup> January 2012.</b>	<b>To comply with statutory requirements.</b>

<b>Relevant Policy (ies):</b>			
<b>Within Policy:</b>	<b>Y</b>	<b>Within Budget:</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Relevant Local Member(s):</b>	<b>Councillor Kathryn Silk</b>		
<b>Person(s) To Implement Decision:</b>	<b>Head of Schools</b>		
<b>Date By When Decision To Be Implemented:</b>	<b>31<sup>st</sup> August 2012</b>		
Contact Officer Name:	Tel:	Fax:	Email:
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### **Background Papers used to prepare Report:**

Letter of objection to statutory notice