

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL

**CABINET REPORT
FOR PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION
3rd January 2012**

REPORT AUTHOR: Gareth Jones
Senior Manager, Central Services

SUBJECT: Closure of Dolfor Community Primary School

REPORT FOR: Decision

Summary

Following a review of small schools in Powys earlier in 2011 by the council's Learning in the Community Programme Board, on 5th July 2011 the council's Cabinet approved the commencement of a consultation process to close Dolfor CP School.

In September 2011 there were 17 pupils at the school of which 8 were in the top two year groups. At the start of the Spring Term 2012, it is anticipated that there will be 16 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 £5,886, 38% higher than the county average.

A consultation meeting with staff, governors and the community was held on 22nd 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 19th September to 31st October 2011. 23 comments on the proposal were received during this period.

On 14th November 2011, the Portfolio Holder for Learning and Leisure agreed to the publication of a statutory notice for closure of Dolfor CP 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 24th November 2011 with the closing date for objections being 24th December.

14 objections were received by the closing date and these are summarised in the attached schedule along with officer comments on them. The original letters of objection are available in the Schools Service. These objections and the council's comments need to be forwarded to the Welsh Government by 7th 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 attached comments on the objections received and send them to the Welsh Government by 7th 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 objections 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 objections received and its comments on them 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 Kath Roberts-Jones has commented as follows:

Whilst my heart tells me that there is a need for the school to continue in the village, having experienced a closure of a primary school in the recent past, knowing just how painful it is for the whole community, my head tells me that, with so few numbers attending it is difficult to see how it can continue as we have a duty to ensure that the best possible education is available for our children.

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.

Recommendation:	Reason for Recommendation:
To forward the objections received to the statutory notice for Dolfor CP School and the council's comments on them to the Welsh Government by 7th January 2012.	To comply with statutory requirements.

Relevant Policy (ies):			
Within Policy:	Y	Within Budget:	Y

Relevant Local Member(s):	Councillor Kath Roberts-Jones
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Person(s) To Implement Decision:	Head of Schools
Date By When Decision To Be Implemented:	31st August 2012

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Background Papers used to prepare Report:

Letters of objection to statutory notice