

**CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CABINET REPORT  
FOR PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION  
14th November 2011**

**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 by the Council's Learning in the Community Programme Board earlier in the year, on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2011 the Council's Cabinet approved the commencement of a consultation process to close Cwmdu C in W (Aided) School.

At the time of writing there are 21 pupils at the school.

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 for 2011/12 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 proposals were explained; this included a timetable explaining that the school could be formally closed by summer 2012. The Council must give one term's notice to a school proposed for closure as well as undertaking the formal statutory notice procedure.

The consultation period for comments to be received on the proposals ran from 19<sup>th</sup> September to 31<sup>st</sup> October. A summary of the representations received by this deadline is shown in Appendix B. An officer response to the main themes from these representations is given below. A copy of all letters and emails received is available in the Schools Service as are the agreed minutes of all the consultation meetings.

Comments from respondents focus on the following themes and an officer response is given in the paragraphs that follow:

- Cultural identity and the school's role in village life

It is acknowledged that the school plays a large part in village life and if the school closed there would be a loss of a social focus for the community. There are however other points of focus for the community such as the church, the village hall, the pub and the cafe. This impact on community life has to be weighed against the small pupil numbers and the high cost per pupil at Cwmdu. Pupil numbers are not sustainable at their current level and there seems to be little prospect of these numbers rising.

- The school's Christian values and links to the church; alternative faith provision is not available

It is recognised that the school's Church in Wales (Aided) status needs to be considered as part of this review. Whilst the Council acknowledges that Llangattock C in W School is full, an additional classroom could be provided at reasonable cost. The distance to Llanbedr C in W (Aided) School (which has capacity) is disputed by some respondents but this school is six miles away from Cwmdu. The Council therefore believes that there is suitable alternative faith provision within reasonable distance. Notwithstanding this, the Council has named a non faith based school – Llangynidr CP School – as the receiving school in the proposed statutory notice as it is the nearest school to Cwmdu. Llangynidr CP School has the physical capacity to increase in size.

- SEN specialism

The results that the school achieves with children with special needs are recognised but it is not the only school that makes significant progress with children with significant SEN/ALN needs, the smaller class sizes in Cwmdu may be a factor that supports an increased level of small group work. If the school does close the authority recognises that the children currently in Cwmdu with significant needs will need an individual plan to ensure they are successfully integrated into their new schools.

- Good standards

The good standards at Cwmdu are not disputed by the Council but standards in alternative schools in the area are at least as good if not better.

- Loss of employment

Whilst any loss of jobs is regretted there will be other opportunities at the receiving schools. Staff have been advised about the Council's redundancy and redeployment policy and will be given support through what is a very difficult process.

- Leaking of small schools review and the impact on numbers

The leak of the information about the small schools review to the press in January 2011 was regrettable and the Portfolio Holder for Learning and Leisure has apologised personally to the community on behalf of the Council. Some respondents are also suggesting that Council officers were putting off potential Cwmdu parents both before and after January 2011. There has however been no deliberate policy of deterring parents from choosing Cwmdu C in W School. The numbers at the school have not shown a significant change from those identified of 23 in the original report to the Learning in the Community Programme Board in January 2011. At the meeting held with officers on the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2010 the governors confirmed that the numbers in the school were not projected to increase.

- Concern about Crickhowell CP School

Despite the high number of surplus places at Crickhowell CP School, it is still attended by over 200 pupils. The Council does not share the concern of people in Cwmdu about Crickhowell CP School and has received no specific complaints from parents about that school. Standards, as measured by Estyn, are technically slightly better in Crickhowell than in Cwmdu. At its last Estyn inspection in 2009 Cwmdu C in W School received 7 grade 2s; Crickhowell CP School (2008) received 6 grade 2s and 1 grade 1.

- Additional transport costs

The Council has factored in the £20-30,000 estimated annual cost of additional school transport if Cwmdy C in W Aided School was to close but the overall net savings would still be of the order of £100,000 per annum.

- School closure should have been considered as part of the area review process

The area review process allows all schools in a catchment to be considered strategically and in consultation with local stakeholders. However, because of the high cost of small schools, there is provision within the Policy for the Organisation of Primary Schools 2006 to review small schools individually when they reach a certain number of pupils. Cwmdy C in W Aided School falls in to this category.

Response C21 and C22 have had an individual response by letter. Contrary to the view of the respondent, the potential receiving schools were all notified of the closure proposals.

The Council does not believe that any of the issues raised during the consultation period should prevent it from proceeding to the publication of statutory notices for closure of the school.

#### Statutory notices

Statutory notices for closure of a school need to be published for one month and are subject to Welsh Government regulations. They must be displayed at all school entrances and published in at least one local newspaper as well as other prominent public places. They must be published not fewer than 15 school days before the end of a term; the last possible publication date before the end of the current term would be 30<sup>th</sup> November. If one objection to a statutory notice is received, the decision falls to the Minister at the Welsh Government to determine. The Council must make its comments on the objections received and send them to the Welsh Government within two weeks of the end of the objection period.

#### Proposal

To publish statutory notices for the closure of Cwmdy C in W Aided School on or around 24<sup>th</sup> November with the closing date for objections being on or around 24<sup>th</sup> December with the receiving school being named as Llangynidr CP School. This timetable would allow, subject to Ministerial approval, the school to be closed by 31<sup>st</sup> August 2012. Free transport to the named receiving school will only be available for qualifying pupils.

#### 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

The school could remain open but this would be a very inefficient use of resources and the number of pupils is at a level where it will become increasingly difficult for a reasonable standard of education to be provided.

### **Preferred Choice and Reasons**

It is in the best interests of the pupils in the school that statutory notices for closure are published as soon as possible.

### **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:

The impact of closure of this school cannot be underestimated. The attached submissions highlight the important role the school has played in the education of generations of children and particularly the significance of offering a mainstream education for many children with additional learning needs. The school plays a pivotal role in sustaining the cultural heritage of the wider community and makes a tremendous contribution to the Church, the Eisteddfod, the local Show as well as the lives of the local residents. The benefits to the wider society cannot be measured in crude financial terms, and the respondents claim that these have not been factored into the LEA's proposals.

### **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 publish statutory notices for the closure of Cwmdu C in W Aided School before the end of November 2011 with the closing date for objections being before the end of December.</b>	<b>To ensure efficient use of resources within the schools service and to provide the best possible standard of education for local children.</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>
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<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>

<b>Contact Officer Name:</b>	<b>Tel:</b>	<b>Fax:</b>	<b>Email:</b>
Owen James	01597 826709		Owen.james@powys.gov.uk

### **Background Papers used to prepare Report:**

Cwmdu Consultation Paper September/October 2011

Cwmdu Community Impact Assessment September/October 2011