School Organisation Policy

Vision 2025

Updated May 2018

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1. INTRODUCTION

A renewed vision for education in Powys

Powys County Council is committed to the success and well-being of every child and young person. We want all children and young people to develop the knowledge, skills and characteristics that will lead them to become personally successful, economically productive and actively engaged citizens.

This is an exciting and inspiring time for education in Powys and Wales. A national educational reform is underway, with a new mission for education, a new curriculum and significant changes to the way support for learners with additional learning needs will be delivered. However, there are also significant challenges facing us, in particular financial pressures, as the Council seeks to balance the needs of a rural authority such as Powys with the reality of reducing funding.

Whilst most Powys schools currently operate as stand-alone primary or secondary schools, many schools are involved in informal collaborative arrangements with one or more other schools, and some are part of new multi-sited models of delivering education. These informal collaborative arrangements and alternative models of delivering education have resulted in many benefits for the schools involved, and have ensured the continued provision of education in rural areas.

This new policy represents a change in the council's approach to developing schools to meet the challenges ahead. We wish to work with schools and communities to develop a positive and innovative network of schools, with schools, families, communities and businesses working together to create a system that is accessible, integrated and responsive, initially focussing on new models of delivering education which would see the retention of provision in rural areas. This does not mean that there will be no school closures in Powys, however the case for closure would need to be strong and not taken until a range of alternative models have been fully explored.

Our education system in Powys is built on a strong partnership with schools, parents, guardians and communities so that our children and young people can become the best they can be and the leaders of tomorrow. We want to further develop this partnership working, and to work with school communities to identify local solutions, acknowledging that there is no single model of delivering education which will be suitable across the whole of Powys. By working together, we can achieve excellence in Powys and give all of our children the opportunity to reach their potential.

Councillor Myfanwy Alexander	**Ian Budd**
Portfolio Holder for Education	Director of Education

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1 Background

In 2017, Powys County Council's new Cabinet launched 'Vision 2025', which sets out its priorities for the coming years, one of which is 'Learning and Skills'. In addition, Vision 2025 includes a commitment to engagement with residents and communities, and a commitment to promote strong partnership working.

In order to ensure that the Council's priorities for developing the model of delivering education within Powys and the Council's methods for carrying out this work align with the Cabinet's vision, the Council has reviewed its previous School Reorganisation Policy.

This new policy replaces the Council's School Reorganisation Policy (2015), and will underpin the Council's approach to school reorganisation up to 2025.

2.2 Legislative background

Any changes to the organisation of schools must be undertaken in accordance with

- Section 38 and 39 of the Schools Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013; or
- The Federation of Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations 2014;

Local authorities and other proposers must comply with the **School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013** and the School Organisation Code and must consider a range of factors when proposing substantial changes to schools, the prime consideration being the interests of learners.

The **School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013**, which came into force on the 4th March 2013, requires that the Welsh Ministers issue a School Organisation Code (the "Code"). The Code outlines the legislative process that local authorities are required to follow when preparing, publishing, approving or determining school organisation proposals.

The **Federation of Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations 2014** which came into force on 22 May 2014 gives effect to local authorities' powers to federate schools. Schools already have powers to federate by choice under provisions introduced in 2010. These powers have now been consolidated into the 2014 Regulations. Statutory guidance containing information and practical advice to governing bodies and local authorities on the federation process has been issued to support the regulations.

2.3 Links to other policies / strategies

This policy links closely with the following national and local policies / strategies / initiatives:

2.3.1 National initiatives

- Well-being of Future Generations Act
- Our National Mission
- Digital Competence Framework
- Cymraeg 2050: A Million Welsh Speakers
- The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act

2.3.2 Local initiatives

- Vision 2025
- Welsh in Education Strategic Plan

3. KEY PURPOSES AND AIMS

3.1 Key Purpose

The Council's Key Purpose is to enable the children and young people of Powys to become:

- Safe, healthy, confident and resilient individuals;
- Ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives;
- Enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work;
- Ethical and informed citizens ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

3.2 Aims

To achieve this Key Purpose, the Council aspires to ensure that Powys has the right number of schools in the right place, and in the right condition, for the current and future pupil population.

The Council aims to have an educational model which fulfils the following:

- Provides all learners with the opportunity to achieve their potential
- Has high quality, resilient leadership and management
- Has high quality learning environments, with the long term aim that all schools will be assessed as condition A or B
- Has a greater focus on collaboration and partnership working, in order to enable schools to provide the best possible opportunities for learners
- Enables schools to operate effectively and efficiently within the funding available
- Increases demand for Welsh-medium provision and provides access to provision which will enable pupils to become confident Welsh speakers
- Develops our schools into establishments that are central to community activity
- Has a high quality ICT infrastructure that will enable all schools to provide enhanced opportunities for learners
- Provides access to high quality early years provision
- Provides support for learners with additional learning needs which aligns with the requirements of the new Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act
- Provides access to high quality post-16 provision in schools, which is attractive to learners, financially sustainable and minimises learner travel

4. PRIORITIES

4.1 Delivery Plan

In order to move towards a more efficient schools network, a new Delivery Plan will be implemented with a greater focus on working in partnership with schools and the communities they serve, and on alternative models of delivering education, such as collaboration models, federation, multi-site schools and all-through schools.

The Council's Delivery Plan will focus on delivering the following priorities:

- Secondary schools to become 'all-through schools', or part of multi-sited arrangements
- Small primary schools[1] to be part of formal collaborations / federations / amalgamations
- Remove infant / junior split by creating 'all-through' primary schools
- New Welsh-medium provision to be established
- Improvements to the Powys schools estate, either as part of the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools Programme or as part of the Council's Asset Management Programme
- A new model for delivering post-16 provision to be implemented
- Transforming the delivery of support for pupils with additional learning needs

In addition to the above priorities, the Council will encourage all schools to:

- Identify areas were staff and / or services can be shared across more than one school in order to improve efficiency
- Develop the use of ICT links between school sites to provide distance learning opportunities

4.2 Closure of provision

The Council's greater focus on alternative models of delivering education does not mean that there will be no closure of provision in Powys.

The current School Organisation Code recognises that the prime purpose of schools is the provision of education and any case for closure should be robust and in the best interests of education provision in the area. However, the Code also recognises that in rural areas a school may also be the main focal point for community activity, and its closure could have implications beyond the issue of the provision of education, particularly if the school buildings are used as a place to provide services to the local community. Any proposals for the closure of provision will only be taken after all alternatives to closure have been conscientiously considered.

There is currently no presumption in favour or against the closure of any type of school. Should any changes to this occur as a result of the Welsh

[1] The Welsh Government defines a 'small school' as a school that contains fewer than 91 registered pupils in the Education (Small Schools) (Wales) Order 2014: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2014/1133/made

Government's planned introduction of a new Code, the Council will adhere to those changes.

5. THE SCHOOL ORGANISATION PROCESS

Any changes to school organisation will be taken forward in discussion with the school communities affected, in order to achieve the best solution for each area, with the Council engaging with governing bodies in order to plan sustainable schools provision for the future. However, whilst the Council will aim to work with governing bodies in order to agree the most appropriate way forward, it is acknowledged that there will be occasions when this will not be possible, and in these cases, the Council will need to make a decision on the most appropriate way forward.

Step 1 – Agreeing the Delivery Plan

- Schools Service Management Team, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Education, to develop a Delivery Plan, focussed on the priorities outlined above, which include an indicative timeframe for each project. Cabinet to approve the Delivery Plan.
- Once the Delivery Plan has been approved it is possible that other potential projects will arise, either through requests from individual governing bodies or due to other issues. Any new potential projects will be considered on a case by case basis by the Learning and Skills Board, who will determine whether or not to incorporate the project into the Delivery Plan

Step 2 – Engagement with school communities

- As part of any project outlined within the Delivery Plan, Council officers will engage in discussions with the governing bodies of the school(s) involved
- Discussions will also take place with Diocesan Representatives and other stakeholders if appropriate
- The aim of these discussions will be to identify a way forward for the school(s) involved

Step 3 – Recommendations

- The Learning and Skills Board will make a recommendation to the Council's Cabinet on the way forward

Step 4 – Statutory Processes

- Should a solution be identified which requires organisational changes to one or more of the schools involved, e.g. establishing a federation of schools or amalgamating schools, the Council would need to follow the statutory procedures as outlined in The Federation of Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations or The School Organisation Code
- Cabinet approval would be required at appropriate stages throughout these processes

6. DEVELOPMENT OF PROPOSALS

In pursuing the Key Purposes and Aims outlined in section 3, the Council will take account of, but not be limited to, the following factors:

6.1 Quality and Standards in Education

The Council's principle driver when developing School Organisation proposals will be the impact on the quality of provision available for learners.

Full consideration will be given to the likely impact on the quality of provision for all pupils. This will include vulnerable pupils, such as those with additional learning needs and those belonging to the protected characteristic groups, and appropriate Impact Assessments will be carried out to consider the impact on these groups of pupils.

6.2 Leadership and Management

Many areas of Powys have experienced difficulties in recruiting headteachers, and shared headteacher arrangements have been introduced in many schools in order to overcome these issues. Whilst these arrangements can bring many benefits for school involved, it is acknowledged that these arrangements can also place additional pressure on headteachers. In addition, the current informal arrangement which are often put in place do not always provide certainty and resilience for the schools.

When developing School Organisation proposals, the Council will consider the impact on the quality of leadership, taking into consideration whether the proposed model would provide resilience in terms of leadership, but also considering the impact on the workload of the headteacher and other leaders, including the governing body.

6.3 Capacity and accommodation

The number of school places and quality of accommodation in the local area will be another key consideration when forming School Organisation proposals, with the aim of ensuring that there are sufficient school places available to meet current and future needs, and that the quality of accommodation and facilities available are at least as good as those currently being accessed by pupils.

Powys County Council aims to provide learning environments that meet the aspirations of the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools programme, and major capital investment in school buildings in Powys will continue to be taken forward through the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools programme. Alongside this, capital funding through our major repairs programme will be focussed on where the need is greatest, as identified through the Schools Service's Asset Management Plan.

When developing proposals, the Council will consider whether or not there is any need for capital investment, either immediately or in the future, in order to successfully implement the proposal. All improvements to school buildings will need to meet agreed minimum requirements for accessibility.

6.4 Geography

Powys is the most sparsely populated county in England and Wales, and there is considerable travelling distance between some communities. The county's rural nature will be a key consideration in any School Organisation developments. The Council's expectation is that every child will be able to access high quality education within a reasonable distance of their home, and within the guidelines provided in the council's Home to School Transport Policy.

The Council acknowledges the importance of rural schools in rural communities, and the contribution they make to the long-term sustainability of the local community, and will prioritise the retention of educational provision in rural communities where possible, through the introduction of alternative, collaborative models of delivery. The proximity of schools involved in any proposed collaborative arrangements will be a key consideration for the Council when identifying schools to move forward with formal federations or amalgamations – in order to ensure the success of these models, the schools will need to be located within a reasonable distance from each other.

When developing proposals, the Council will give full consideration to the impact on home to school transport, including the nature of journeys to alternative provision and the resulting journey times for pupils and the cost of any additional home to school transport required.

6.5 Use of Financial Resources

Powys County Council, like many other local authorities, is currently facing significant financial pressure, which is unlikely to improve in the coming years. This pressure is affecting all council services, including schools.

In order to continue to provide high quality services in this challenging financial climate, the authority needs to work towards a more efficient model of delivering education, whilst also retaining access to provision in rural communities. To realise this, the authority will facilitate greater collaboration between schools, and will support schools to move towards shared staffing arrangements. These initiatives will enable schools to operate more efficiently, in order to maximise use of their budgets.

Whilst the Council will move forward with a greater focus on working in partnership with schools and the communities they serve, and on alternative, multi-sited models of delivering education, this does not mean that there will be no school closures in Powys. However, the case for closure would need to be strong and not taken until alternative models have been fully explored.

When developing proposals, the Council will consider the impact on the distribution of funding between mainstream schools within the local authority's area, the cost of proposals, any additional transport costs and the scale of any projected net savings.

6.6 The Welsh Language

In July 2017, the Welsh Government launched Cymraeg 2050[2], an ambitious new Welsh language strategy which sets out the vision to reach one million Welsh speakers by 2050. This strategy acknowledges the role of education in the achievement of this aim, and also states that *'Welsh-medium immersion education is our principal method for ensuring that children can develop their Welsh language skills, and for creating new speakers.'*

Powys County Council acknowledges the key role that Welsh-medium education will play in achieving the Welsh Government's aim to increase the number of Welsh speakers. The impact on access to Welsh-medium provision will be a key consideration when developing proposals which impact on Welsh-medium provision, and in these cases, a Welsh language impact assessment will be carried out. In addition, the authority will consider whether there is a need to introduce Welsh-medium provision in areas where there is currently no access to Welsh-medium provision.

6.7 Impact on the community

The Council acknowledges the role of Powys schools within their local communities, particularly in the case of schools in rural locations. Many schools are used extensively by their communities, and make an important contribution to community life.

The Council aspires to maximise this, and to further develop the role of all schools in their community, with the aim of co-locating Council services and other services on school sites, in particular as part of new build projects.

The Council will assess the impact of proposals on the community when developing any School Organisation proposals, and will fully explore alternative models of delivering education which would see the retention of provision in local communities.

[2] http://gov.wales/topics/welshlanguage/welsh-language-strategy-and-policies/cymraeg-2050-welsh-language-strategy/lang=en

APPENDIX A GLOSSARY

All-through school

All-through schools are those that combine primary and secondary education in one establishment. Some are located on separate sites, whilst others are located on one site. Powys currently has one all-through school, Ysgol Bro Hyddgen in Machynlleth, which was established in 2014 following the amalgamation of Machynlleth Primary School and Ysgol Bro Ddyfi. All-through schools are growing in popularity across Wales, in both rural and urban areas.

To establish an all-through school, the authority would need to follow the formal process as outlined in the School Organisation Code.

Amalgamation

An amalgamation would see two or more schools merging and becoming one school, operating on their current sites, under one headteacher and governing body.

In order to amalgamate schools, the authority would need to follow the formal process as outlined in the School Organisation Code.

Collaboration

Bringing schools together under collaboration arrangements can make better use of resources, pool expertise, and allow schools to explore ways of doing things more effectively and efficiently. All schools are encouraged to collaborate with a range of other schools and there is no formal agreement required for this kind of collaboration. However, there are regulations in place to establish more formal partnerships between schools: 'The Collaboration Between Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations 2008'.

Federation

The term 'federation' describes a formal and legal agreement by which the schools involved work together in formal partnership under a single governing body. Schools in a federation remain separate; they retain their names and their individual identity. They are individually inspected by Estyn, and individual data is collected by the Local Authority and the Welsh Government.

In rural communities, federation is seen as an opportunity to strengthen the sustainability of schools, and to ensure that schools are retained in their local communities. Federation also enables smaller groups of pupils and staff to network and share good practice, ideas and resources.

A proposal to establish a federation can either be taken forward by the local authority or by the governing bodies of the schools involved in the federation. There is a defined process which needs to be followed in order to establish a federation. This process is outlined in the Welsh Government Circular 011/2014, 'Federation process of maintained schools in Wales:

	Guidance for governing bodies and local authorities', which was issued in May 2014.
Multi-sited school	A school that operates across more than one campus e.g. Newtown High School, which includes a second campus in Presteigne.
Rural School	The Welsh Government has recently consulted on revisions to its School Organisation Code, which has designated some schools as rural primary schools for the purposes of the presumption against closure of rural schools. A proposed list comprising "villages in the sparsest context" and "other sparsest context" of the National Statistics Urban-Rural Classification identified 191 schools (out of 1275 primary schools in Wales). A list of schools identified as rural schools was attached to the consultation paper. The consultation document suggests that this is the minimum number of schools which should be designated as rural for the purpose of the presumption against closure of rural schools. The final methodology and list will be included in the revised Statutory Code.
School Organisation Code	The School Organisation Code is made under Sections 38 and 39 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013. It imposes requirements on relevant bodies and includes statutory guidance which they must take account of when making proposals for the reorganisation of schools.
Small School	In the Education (Small Schools) (Wales) Order 2014, the Welsh Government defines a 'Small School' as a school that contains fewer than 91 registered pupils.[3]
Welsh in Education Strategic Plan	All authorities are required to prepare a plan outlining how they will develop Welsh-medium education, with the aim of increasing the number of pupils educated through the medium of Welsh.

[3] Education (Small Schools) (Wales) Order 2014: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2014/1133/made