

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

CABINET EXECUTIVE

13th July 2021

**REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Phyl Davies
Portfolio Holder for Education and Property**

**REPORT TITLE: Llanfyllin/North Welshpool Area Transformation Phase 2
Proposal Paper**

REPORT FOR: Decision

1. Purpose

1.1 This paper requests Cabinet approval to commence the statutory process on the following proposal:

- To close Ysgol Bro Cynllaith from the 31st August 2022, with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools in Powys

1.2 The report is supported by the following appendices:

- Appendix A – Options Appraisal – Bro Cynllaith, Pennant, Llanrhaeadr
- Appendix B – Options Appraisal – Ysgol Bro Cynllaith
- Appendix C – Draft Community Impact Assessment
- Appendix D – Draft Integrated Impact Assessment

2. Background

Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys

2.1 On the 14th April 2020, a new Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys was approved by the Leader via a delegated decision.

2.2 The Strategy was developed following extensive engagement with a range of stakeholders during two separate periods between October 2019 and March 2020.

2.3 The Strategy sets out a new vision for education in Powys, which is as follows:

‘All children and young people in Powys will experience a high quality, inspiring education to help develop the knowledge, skills and attributes that will enable them to become healthy, personally fulfilled, economically productive, socially responsible and globally engaged citizens of 21st century Wales.’

2.4 The Strategy also sets out a number of guiding principles which will underpin the transformation of education in Powys. These are as follows:

- *A world class rural education system that has learner entitlement at its core*
- *Schools that are fully inclusive, with a culture of deep collaboration in order to improve learner outcomes and experience*
- *A broad choice and high quality of provision for 14 – 19 year old learners, that includes both academic and vocational provision, meeting the needs of all learners, communities and the Powys economy*
- *Welsh-medium provision that is accessible and provides a full curriculum in Welsh from Meithrin to age 19 and beyond*
- *Provision for learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN)/Additional Learning Needs (ALN) that is accessible as near to home as is practicably possible, with the appropriate specialist teaching, support and facilities that enables every learner to meet their potential*
- *A digitally-rich schools sector that enables all learners and staff to enhance their teaching and learning experience*
- *Community-focused schools that are the central point for multi-agency services to support children, young people, families and the community*
- *Early years provision that is designed to meet the needs of all children, mindful of their particular circumstances, language requirements or any special or additional learning needs*
- *Financially and environmentally sustainable schools*
- *The highest priority is given to staff wellbeing and professional development*

2.5 The new Strategy sets out a number of Strategic Aims and Objectives, to shape the Council's work to transform the Powys education system over the coming years. One of these aims is to '*improve learner entitlement and experience*' and includes an objective to '*rationalise primary provision*'.

Llanfyllin / North Welshpool Programme Business Case

2.6 Following approval of the new Strategy, a Programme Business Case (PBC) was developed for the Llanfyllin / North Welshpool catchment. The PBC was considered by Cabinet on the 29th September 2020.

2.7 Without requiring Cabinet to make a decision on the future configuration of schools in the catchment, the PBC identified a preferred way forward for the Llanfyllin / North Welshpool area as follows:

- A new community campus for approximately 900 pupils aged 4 – 18 in Llanfyllin, replacing the current poor condition buildings of Ysgol Llanfyllin – to be built on the current Ysgol Llanfyllin site.
- To establish and build a new 360 place area school, to replace Carreghofa School and Llandysilio C. in W. School – this could also potentially include neighbouring schools in the Welshpool catchment as well. Site to be confirmed.
- To establish a new Welsh-medium school on the current Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant site, replacing both Ysgol Pennant and Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant Primary School. This may require capital funding to extend the school.
- To provide an extension to Llansantffraid C. in W. Primary School.
- Possible closure of Llangedwyn C. in W. School, Llanfechain C. in W. School and Ysgol Bro Cynllaith.

2.8 On the 18th March 2021, Cabinet considered a further paper in respect of Llangedwyn C. in W. School, Llanfechain C. in W. School and Llansantffraid C. in W. School, which considered options for the church schools in the area in light of the PBC for the catchment. This paper set out the Council's intention to take forward the Transformation Programme in the Llanfyllin/North Welshpool catchment area on a phased basis as follows:

- Phase 1 – the development and consideration of options for Llangedwyn CIW Primary School and Llanfechain CIW Primary School, along with plans for capital investment in Llansantffraid CIW Primary School.
- Phase 2 – the development and consideration of options for Ysgol Bro Cynllaith, Ysgol Gynradd Pennant and Ysgol Gynradd Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant.
- Phase 3 – the development and consideration of options for Llandysilio CiW Primary School, Carreghofa CP School, Arddleen CP School and Brynhafren CP School.

2.9 The paper considered by Cabinet on the 19th March addressed Phase 1 above, and included a recommendation to commence the statutory process on proposals relating to Llangedwyn C. in W. School, Llanfechain C. in W. School and Llansantffraid C. in W. School. Consultation on these proposals is expected to commence in the autumn term.

2.10 The Council has subsequently considered options for Ysgol Bro Cynllaith, Ysgol Gynradd Pennant and Ysgol Gynradd Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant in order to take forward Phase 2 as outlined above.

2.11 This paper only relates to Phase 2 above and does not refer to Phases 1 or 3. A paper in respect of Phase 3 will be considered by Cabinet in due course.

Options for Ysgol Bro Cynllaith, Ysgol Pennant and Ysgol Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant

- 2.12 An Options Appraisal exercise has been carried out in respect of Ysgol Bro Cynllaith, Ysgol Pennant and Ysgol Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant. This is attached to this report as Appendix A.
- 2.13 The Options Appraisal exercise has included the following steps:
- Consideration of key data relating to Ysgol Bro Cynllaith, Ysgol Pennant, Ysgol Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant
 - Identification of options
 - SWOT analysis of each option
 - Assessment of each option against a number of critical success factors
 - Identification of an emerging preferred option
- 2.14 The Options Appraisal carried out in respect of the three schools identified 4 possible options. All 4 of these options involve the closure of Ysgol Bro Cynllaith.
- 2.15 Based on the outcome of the Options Appraisal exercise, the following next steps are identified:

9.1 Ysgol Bro Cynllaith

All of the options identified as possible options for Ysgol Bro Cynllaith, Ysgol Gynradd Pennant and Ysgol Gynradd Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant include the closure of Ysgol Bro Cynllaith.

It is therefore recommended that the Council develops a further options appraisal paper relating to the potential closure of Ysgol Bro Cynllaith, to be considered by Cabinet in due course.

9.2 Ysgol Gynradd Pennant and Ysgol Gynradd Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant

There are a number of options which have been identified as 'possible' options in respect of Ysgol Llanrhaeadr and Ysgol Pennant.

However, as indicated in section 3.2 above, the most significant challenges affecting schools in this area of the Llanfyllin catchment relate to Ysgol Bro Cynllaith not Ysgol Gynradd Pennant or Ysgol Gynradd Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant. It is therefore recommended that the Council does not proceed with any of these options for Ysgol Gynradd Pennant or Ysgol Gynradd Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant at this time.

The Council will continue to monitor the situation at the two schools, and should there be a significant change in pupil numbers and/or leadership arrangements at either school, the Council will reconsider options relating to the two schools.

The dual stream model at Ysgol Gynradd Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant continues to be a concern, due to the small number of pupils attending each stream. In accordance with Strategic Objective 3.1 of the Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys – ‘Move schools along the language continuum’ – it is recommended that Workstream 3 (Welsh-medium) of the Transforming Education is asked to develop a plan to support Ysgol Gynradd Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant to increase the proportion of pupils accessing Welsh-medium provision at the school, with the aim of moving the school along the language continuum.’

- 2.16 A separate Options Appraisal has subsequently been prepared to consider options for Ysgol Bro Cynllaith. This is attached to this report at Appendix B.

3. The Case for Change – Ysgol Bro Cynllaith

3.1 Information about Ysgol Bro Cynllaith

The following primary schools are located within approximately 10 miles of Ysgol Bro Cynllaith:

School	Distance from Ysgol Bro Cynllaith by road (miles)
Llangedwyn C. in W. School	3.573 miles
Trefonen CofE Primary School (Shropshire)	4.255 miles
Woodside Primary School (Shropshire)	5.149 miles
Selattyn CofE Primary School (Shropshire)	5.304 miles
Ysgol Llanarmon DC (Wrexham)	6.136 miles
Llanrhaeadr Ym Mochnant C.P. School	6.233 miles
Llansantffraid C. in W. (A) School	6.411 miles
Llanfechain C. in W. School	6.939 miles
Ysgol Llanfyllin	8.341 miles

Ysgol Pennant	8.525 miles
Bryn Offa CofE Primary School (Shropshire)	8.553 miles
Carreghofa C.P. School	9.761 miles

The following is a summary of key data relating to Ysgol Bro Cynllaith:

	School Type	Language Category	Admission Number	Rural School? ¹
Ysgol Bro Cynllaith	Community Primary School building owned by Powys County Council	English-medium	7	Yes

Pupil numbers

i) Pupil numbers

Pupil Finance Count Day – November 2020

	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Ysgol Bro Cynllaith	4	1	3	4	5	3	4	24

Teacher Centre – 7th July 2021

	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Ysgol Bro Cynllaith	4	1	4	4	6	3	4	26

ii) Historical pupil numbers²

¹ Annex F of the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (2018) (<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-10/school-organisation-code-second-edition.pdf>) includes a list of 'rural schools', to which the 'Presumption against the closure of rural schools' applies. Whilst the Code does not identify Ysgol Bro Cynllaith on the list of 'rural school', the Council acknowledges that the school is a rural school, and therefore will undertake the additional steps required in respect of Ysgol Bro Cynllaith.

² PLASC 2020

	Jan. 2014	Jan. 2015	Jan. 2016	Jan. 2017	Jan. 2018	Jan. 2019	Jan. 2020
Ysgol Bro Cynllaith	42	38	38	32	29	30	26

iii) Projected pupil numbers (Birth rate)³

	Jan. 2021	Jan. 2022	Jan. 2023	Jan. 2024	Jan. 2025
Ysgol Bro Cynllaith	26	27	28	27	25

iv) Projected pupil numbers (Finance projections)⁴

	Jan. 2022	Jan. 2023	Jan. 2024	Jan. 2025	Jan. 2026
Ysgol Bro Cynllaith	24	25	27	N/A	N/A

Building Capacity and Condition

i) Capacity

The following table provides information about the school's current capacity:

	Current Capacity ⁵	Currently Filled	Surplus Capacity
Ysgol Bro Cynllaith	48	24 (50%)	24 (50%)

ii) Building condition⁶

In 2009, Welsh Government carried out condition and suitability assessments of the school.

	Condition	Suitability	Access to hall on site	Estimated backlog maintenance

³ Powys Schools Service Projections based on PLASC & Birth Rates

⁴ Powys Finance Projections based on data provided by the school

⁵ Welsh Government School Places Return – August 2020

⁶ Premises Data Return to Welsh Government – 2020

Ysgol Bro Cynllaith	B Good	B Good	Yes – access to community hall	
----------------------------	-----------	-----------	--------------------------------	--

In 2020, the Council commissioned a new condition assessment of the school which judged the school's condition to be C+.

Standards of Education

i) Estyn

	Ysgol Bro Cynllaith
Date of Inspection	June 2015
Standards	Good
Wellbeing	Good
Learning experiences	Adequate
Teaching	Good
Care, support and guidance	Good
Learning environment	Good
Leadership	Good
Improving quality	Adequate
Partnership working	Good
Resource management	Good
Follow Up	School to draw up action plan. Estyn to monitor progress.

ii) School Categorisation⁷

	Standards Group	Improvement Capacity	Support Capacity
Ysgol Bro Cynllaith	N/A	B	Yellow

⁷ 2019. Categorisations were not carried out in 2020 due to Covid-19.

Financial information

i) Cost per pupil (Section 52 Budget Statement, 2019/2020)

	Budget share per school	Budget share per pupil	Notional SEN budget	Non ISB funds devolved to the school
Ysgol Bro Cynllaith	£197,000	£7,295	£14,000	£3,000
Powys average (Primary)	N/A	£4,264	N/A	N/A

3.2 Why change is needed

The following is a summary of the main challenges facing Ysgol Bro Cynllaith:

i) Low pupil numbers

Current pupil numbers⁸ at Ysgol Bro Cynllaith are as follows:

	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Ysgol Bro Cynllaith	4	1	3	4	5	3	4	24

The Welsh Government defines a ‘small school’ as a school with fewer than 91 pupils, and are expected to remain below 30 for the foreseeable future.

The school’s low pupil numbers have also resulted in a high number of surplus places at the school. Based on current pupil numbers, there is currently 50% surplus capacity at the school.

ii) High budget share per pupil

Based on the Council’s Section 52 Budget Statement for 2020-21, the school’s budget share per pupil during 2020-21 was £7,295. This is significantly higher than the Powys average of £4,264. Ysgol Bro Cynllaith is ranked the 3rd highest school in Powys by budget share per pupil.

iii) Issues with the building

⁸ Finance NOR – 2020 Pupil Count Day (6th November 2020)

A Welsh Government condition survey carried out in 2009 judged that the condition of the building was 'B – Good' and its suitability was 'B – Good'. In 2020, the Council commissioned a new condition survey which concluded that the condition grading of the school was C+. The school is run from within a building thought to have been constructed circa 1960's. The original building is constructed from cavity walls and laid in a stretcher bond formation, with one timber framed building used as an additional teaching area. The cabin known as 'Block B' is approaching the end of its life expectancy and is showing signs of deterioration.

iv) Leadership

Whilst there is permanent leadership in place in Ysgol Bro Cynllaith, the headteacher has a significant teaching commitment, which limits the time available to focus on leadership of the school.

v) Combined age classes

The small pupil numbers at the school mean that pupils are taught in whole key stage classes, with Key Stage 2 in one class and Foundation Phase in another class. Because pupil numbers in each year group are small, it is more difficult to ensure all pupils are appropriately challenged.

4. Options Appraisal exercise

- 4.1 Following the options appraisal exercise for Ysgol Bro Cynllaith, Ysgol Pennant and Ysgol Llanrhaeadr which is described below, a separate options appraisal has been carried out for Ysgol Bro Cynllaith.
- 4.2 The options appraisal considers a range of identified reasonable options for Ysgol Bro Cynllaith, including the possibility of federation. School. This is attached to this report as Appendix A.
- 4.3 The options appraisal included the following steps:
 - Consideration of key data relating to Ysgol Bro Cynllaith
 - Identification of options
 - SWOT analysis of each option
 - Assessment of each option against a number of critical success factors
 - Identification of an initial emerging preferred option
 - Further consideration of the emerging preferred option against factors listed in the School Organisation Code (2018) as factors to be taken into account when developing school organisation proposals.
- 4.4 Based on the options appraisal carried out and further consideration against factors outlined in the School Organisation Code, the preferred option is as follows:

Close Ysgol Bro Cynllaith, pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools in Powys.

4.5 The reasons for this are:

- Would address the issue of low pupil numbers
- Would reduce the Council's overall surplus capacity in primary schools
- Revenue saving to the Council
- Pupils would attend larger schools, which could provide a wider range of educational and extra-curricular opportunities
- Pupils will be taught in classes with peers of similar ages
- Pupils would attend schools with better quality accommodation
- Minimal impact on any other schools
- Would enable pupils to continue to access provision in Powys
- Meets all of the Critical Success Factors

5 Presumption against closure of Rural Schools

The School Organisation Code (2018) includes special arrangements in regard to schools identified in Appendix F of the Code as rural schools, which require proposers to follow a more detailed set of procedures and requirements in formulating a rural school closure proposal and in consulting on and reaching a decision as to whether to implement a rural school closure proposal.

As indicated in the Code:

'This does not mean that a rural school will never close but the case for closure must be strong and all viable alternatives to closure must have been conscientiously considered by the proposer, including federation.'

The School Organisation Code includes a number of steps required to be taken when formulating a rural school proposal which relate to the following headings:

- Formulating the proposal
- Identifying reasonable alternatives
- Preparing a proposal paper for the decision maker

Whilst the School Organisation Code does not identify Ysgol Bro Cynllaith as a rural school, the Council acknowledges that the school is a rural school, and therefore the additional requirements for rural schools have been addressed when developing the proposal paper.

6 Draft Community Impact Assessment

6.1 A draft Community Impact Assessment has been carried out on the preferred option, which considers the impact on the community. This has

been developed with input from the school. This is attached as Appendix C.

6.2 The draft Community Impact Assessment includes the following conclusion:

- It is clear that a wide range of extra curricular activities are available to pupils at Ysgol Bro Cynllaith. Should there be no school in Llansilin, pupils would transfer to alternative schools in Powys. These would be larger schools, and the expectation is that at least a similar range of activities would be available for pupils. However, it is acknowledged that for pupils for whom Ysgol Bro Cynllaith is currently the closest school, additional travel would be required to enable pupils to access their closest school. This could impact on their ability to access activities, particularly where these take place after school.
- The information received by the school suggests that there are extensive links between the school and the local community, and that many community activities are arranged in the school which are accessed by the community. It is therefore acknowledged that closure of the school could have an impact on the community in terms of the services and activities available.
- Should the Council proceed with the proposal, it is anticipated that facilities and services would be provided in the community hall should there be no school in Llansilin. However, the school has indicated that the closure of the school could have a significant impact on the ability for the hall to continue to run.
- It is also acknowledged that implementation of the proposal would result in additional travel to school for pupils for whom Llansilin is currently their closest school. Whilst free home to school transport would be provided to eligible pupils in accordance with the home to school transport policy which is in operation at that time, it is acknowledged that there could be an impact on some pupils' ability to access after school activities, and could impact on the ability of parents to take part in school events, meetings etc.

7 Advice

7.1 It is advised that Cabinet approves a recommendation to commence the statutory process on the following proposal:

- To close Ysgol Bro Cynllaith from the 31st August 2022, with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools in Powys

7.2 The reasons for this are:

- Would address the issue of low pupil numbers
- Would reduce the Council's overall surplus capacity in primary schools
- Revenue saving to the Council
- Pupils would attend larger schools, which could provide a wider range of educational and extra-curricular opportunities
- Pupil would be taught in classes with peers of similar ages
- Pupils would attend schools with better quality accommodation
- Minimal impact on any other schools
- Would enable pupils to continue to access provision in Powys
- Meets all of the Critical Success Factors

7.3 Should the recommendation to commence the statutory process be approved, it is anticipated that consultation would commence in September 2021.

7.4 It must also be noted that implementation of this proposal does not preclude that school from being a part of future reorganisation proposals.

8. Resource Implications

8.1 The amount of funding provided to schools is driven by the funding formula. Any change to the formula funding provided will impact on the Council's revenue budget. Based on the current formula, it is estimated that implementation of the proposal would result in annual revenue savings to the Council of around **£81,300**. This overall figure comprises a potential saving on Schools' delegated funding of over £140,000, estimated catering savings of £1,300 offset by estimated additional transport costs of £60,000.

8.2 It must be noted that there are other developments within the area which could impact on these estimated savings. These are complex catchment-wide proposals that are particularly sensitive to the final destinations of the learners and the potential for the need for an additional class at one of the receiving schools. If this were the case, then this could reduce the estimated savings by around £60,000.

8.2 In line with the Council's Scheme for Financing Schools, should a school be in a deficit budget position when closed the deficit is written off.

8.3 The Scheme for Financing Schools also states the following in section 3.7.2:

'In order to ensure effective stewardship of the resources available to schools, the Authority may impose additional restrictions on a school scheduled to close, including but not limited to:

- Restriction of expenditure to agreed plans

- Removal of powers of virement'

The Council will consider the use of these powers of intervention where appropriate.

- 8.4 Implementation of the proposal would require involvement from a number of service areas, including staff from the Schools Service, Finance, HR and ICT. These service areas will be kept informed of the development of the proposal throughout the statutory process.
- 8.5 The Deputy Head of Finance (Deputy Section 151 Officer) notes the content of the report and can support the recommendation.

9. Legal implications

- 9.1 Legal: the recommendations can be accepted from a legal point of view
- 9.2 The Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) has commented as follows: " I note the legal comment and have nothing to add to the report".

10. Comment from local member(s)

- 10.1 Cllr Aled Davies: I note the community impact assessment, which has been developed with information supplied by the school, which shows that there would be a significant impact on the community if the school were to close. I'm also very concerned about the travel times for the younger children to travel to alternative schools. It is very important for the Council to ensure that the consultation process is carried out in a fair, transparent and thorough manner to ensure that all views are heard.

11. Integrated Impact Assessment (draft)

- 11.1 A draft integrated impact assessment in respect of the recommendation is attached as Appendix D. The impact assessment considers the proposal's impact on the Welsh Government's well-being goals, as outlined in the Well-being of Future Generations Act.
- 11.2 The summary of the impact assessment is as follows:

The aim of the proposal is to improve the educational provision for learners in line with the new Curriculum for Wales which is being rolled out. However, whilst this impact assessment has identified some positive aspects, in particular relating to learning and skills and ensuring the best strategic management of the Powys schools' estate, the assessment has also identified some negative aspects. These primarily relate to the impact on the community of Llansilin due to loss of educational provision from the village, and the associated additional travel requirements for pupils. In addition, whilst the proposal is that

pupils would transfer to alternative schools in Powys, it is possible that some pupils would transfer to provision in Shropshire, which would mean that they would no longer access a Welsh curriculum, and could impact on the Welsh identity of the village of Llansilin.

- 11.3 Should Cabinet approve the commencement of the statutory process in respect of the recommendation, the impact assessment would be updated throughout the process, to take account of feedback received.

12. Recommendation

- 12.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approves commencing the statutory process on the following proposal:

- To close Ysgol Bro Cynllaith from the 31st August 2022, with pupils to transfer to their nearest alternative schools in Powys

Contact Officer:	Marianne Evans
Tel:	01597 826155
Email:	Marianne.evans@powys.gov.uk
Head of Service:	Emma Palmer – Head of Transformation & Communications Lynette Lovell – Interim Chief Education Officer
Corporate Director:	Dr Caroline Turner