

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD BY TEAMS ON TUESDAY, 8 MARCH 2022

PRESENT

County Councillor M R Harris (Chair)

County Councillors MC Alexander, B Baynham, P Davies, A W Davies, H Hulme and R Powell

In attendance: County Councillor J Morris

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

County Councillor Rosemarie Harris declared an interest in item 4 Llanbedr Church in Wales School as the governor of a potential receiving school.

County Councillor Myfanwy Alexander declared an interest in item 6 Llanfyllin Schools Transformation Update as the relative of a teacher at a school in the area.

3. LLANBEDR OBJECTION REPORT

The Leader left the meeting whilst this item was being considered. The Deputy Leader took the chair for this item. He thanked the school for the warm welcome the Cabinet had received when they had visited.

Cabinet considered the responses received during the statutory objection period to the proposal to close Llanbedr C. in W. School from the 31st August 2022, with pupils to attend their nearest alternative schools. 349 objections had been received during the statutory objection period. A summary of the objections received were included in an appendix to the report along with the Council's response to the issues raised in the objections.

Having considered the objections received, it was recommended that the Council proceed with implementation of the proposal to close Llanbedr C. in W. School from the 31st August 2022, as outlined in the Statutory Notice for the reasons outlined in the report.

County Councillor John Morris spoke as the local member and said that it would be a mistake to close a successful, high achieving and happy school that was full. He argued that the figures in the report on the number of the pupils were out of date and that the additional costs of transporting children did not reflect the recent rise in the cost of fuel. He said that the average cost per pupil which was around the Powys average and was well below that of other areas where schools were being kept open. He challenged the idea that pupils would be better off in larger schools or that the new curriculum could not be delivered at the school.

Officers provided Cabinet with the pupil numbers as of January 2022 and explained that the average cost per pupil was based on the number of pupils in classes from Reception to Year 6 which was funded by the delegated budget. This calculation was applied consistently across the county. Officers advised that Llanbedr was the closest school for 38% of the pupils attending. If the school was closed Crickhowell Primary School would be the closest school for 61% of pupils. It was also confirmed that there were places available at schools within 10 miles including at Church in Wales schools and that journey times would be less than 45 minutes.

Cabinet was reminded that, in respect of the religious character of the school, the School Organisation Code, stated that alternative provision of the same nature should wherever possible remain available and accessible to pupils. However, the Code went on to say that in some areas it may not be compatible with the cost effectiveness provision of education to continue to maintain access to schools of the same nature. The points made in the case for change reflected the broader surplus capacity in the area.

Officers were asked about the nurturing environment provided in small schools and the Director of Education advised that the nurturing provision in larger schools was as just as strong with more staff available to provide support. With respect to the new curriculum, the Director noted that it would place an increased burden on head teachers in smaller schools were they often had teaching responsibilities. She advised the Cabinet that of the pioneer schools that had tested it, only one was under a 100 pupils and the average size was 342 pupils.

Cabinet was advised that as a voluntary aided school, Llanbedr was responsible for its own admission arrangements and that if the recommendation was accepted provision for nursery age pupils would not be the same as was currently available but that it would be in line with the provision available elsewhere in the county.

Having considered the objections and the comments made at the meeting it was

RESOLVED

- 1. To receive the Objection Report in respect of closing Llanbedr C. in W. School.**
- 2. To approve the proposal to close Llanbedr C. in W. School from the 31st August 2022, with pupils to attend their nearest alternative schools.**
- 3. In accordance with the Scheme for Financing Schools, to introduce the following restrictions on Llanbedr C. in W. School:**
 - Spend at the school is restricted to that included in its approved budget plan and no virement of funds between budget headings is permitted unless approved by the Authority;**
 - Any staffing changes are subject to approval by the Authority;**

- **Any contracts awarded for the supply of goods or services are subject to approval by the Authority.**

The Leader returned to the meeting.

4. SENNYBRIDGE C.P. SCHOOL STRATEGIC OUTLINE CASE (SOC)
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Cabinet was asked to give its approval to submit a Strategic Outline Case (SOC) to the Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme (formerly the 21st Century Schools Programme) for investment to develop a new 150 place dual stream primary school to replace Sennybridge C.P. School's current building.

The estimated cost was £10,254,582 which included 8% Risk and 24% Optimism Bias, which was acceptable at SOC stage, and which would be mitigated as the business case process continued into the next stages. The project would be 65% funded by Welsh Government and 35% funded by the County Council. The funding for the project was allocated in the Council's Band B 21st C Schools Programme.

Officers responded to questions received in emails from the independent member of the Governance and Audit Committee, Mr John Brautigam, and County Councillor Pete Roberts, Chair of the Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee querying why the costs of the project were significantly higher than Welsh Government guidance. The costs had been estimated against tender price index projections, published indices and fluctuations in the cost of materials. They reflected the costs of delivering a major building project in rural Mid Wales. The business case process had considered the needs and the solutions to address the needs and had concluded that the preferred way forward was a new build school for Sennybridge. It was confirmed that the HoWPS design development team would remain on the project when they transferred back to the Council.

Cabinet noted the comments of the local member, County Councillor Edwin Roderick, who was very supportive of the proposal.

RESOLVED to approve submission of a Strategic Outline Case (SOC) to the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools Programme for investment to develop a new 150 place dual stream primary school to replace Sennybridge C.P. School's current building.

5. TRANSFORMING EDUCATION PROGRAMME - LLANFYLLIN SCHOOLS TRANSFORMATION PROGRESS UPDATE
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County Councillor Alexander left the meeting while this item was being considered.

Cabinet was advised that it had not been possible to bring any new proposals to Cabinet by March as requested, due to officers' workload and the need to focus on other proposals that are further progressed.

Initial informal discussions had started with schools in the area to gain a greater understanding of local issues and pressures on the schools, as well as to begin to consider possible options that may address challenges faced by the schools as they are three very small schools located within a relatively geographic area, with two of the schools already operating as a formal federation. It was expected that proposals will be brought back to Cabinet later in the year.

Cabinet noted the comments of County Councillor Arwel Jones who had reminded Cabinet that an area primary school was due to be considered at Four Crosses. Officers confirmed that this remained in the work programme for the schools transformation team as was the commitment given to look at cross border issues.

RESOLVED that Cabinet notes the update and requests officers to move forward at pace.

County Councillor Alexander returned to the meeting.

6. NORTH POWYS PROJECT STRATEGIC OUTLINE CASE
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Cabinet considered the Strategic Outline Case for the North Powys Wellbeing Programme to establish a multi-agency wellbeing campus in Newtown and the supporting Memorandum of Understanding ready for submission to Welsh Government. The Strategic Outline Case set out the Strategic Case, the Economic Case, the Commercial Case, the Financial Case and the Management Case.

A core aim of the programme was to provide significantly improved and enhanced local integrated services, delivered from a single location within sustainable and fit-for-purpose accommodation. The strategic case demonstrated the campus was fully aligned and would deliver against a number of national and local policies and strategies. It would significantly contribute to the decarbonisation agenda and Programme for Government through development of the hub, focus on wellbeing and integration of primary and community care services with pharmacy, education, housing, third sector and other community-based services.

The multi-agency wellbeing campus would include

- A Rural Regional Diagnostics and Treatment Centre
- An Integrated Health and Care
- A Learning, Innovation and Community Hub
- Supported Living Accommodation

Cabinet welcomed this major development for Newtown.

RESOLVED

- 1. To note the current position and progress made in relation to the programme.**
- 2. To note the outputs of the demand, capacity and financial modelling.**

3. To approve the draft **Strategic Outline Case in Appendix one in readiness for submission to Welsh Government following endorsement of the Programme Business Case.**
4. To approve the **Memorandum of Understanding between Powys Teaching Health Board and Powys County Council (Appendix E of the Strategic Outline Case).**

7.	POWYS HOUSING SUPPORT PROGRAMME (HSP) STRATEGY 2022-2026
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Cabinet was asked to adopt the Housing Support Programme (HSP) Strategy 2022-2026, as the key strategic framework for delivering the Council's Housing priorities and Homelessness prevention objectives in Powys.

The HSP Strategy provided a strategic overview of the Council's approach to homelessness prevention and housing support services. It included both statutory homelessness functions, funded through the Council's General Fund, and non-statutory preventative services funded through Housing Support Grant (HSG), and the roles to be played by the Council and other housing and support providers working in Powys.

Adoption of the HSP Strategy 2022-2026 would ensure that the Council complied with its statutory obligations in respect of homelessness and housing support. It would also underpin the importance of strengthening working relationships between statutory and non-statutory providers of support and accommodation to both prevent and reduce homelessness across Powys.

RESOLVED to adopt the Powys HSP Strategy 2022-2026.

8.	HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) THIRTY YEAR FINANCIAL BUSINESS PLAN STARTING 2022-2023
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Cabinet considered the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Thirty Year Financial Business Plan Starting 2022-2023. The HRA Thirty Year Business Plan would:

- Make sure the HRA treasury management strategy is prudent and complies with the Council's approach to borrowing.
- Set a balanced budget with minimum reserve of £1,000,000 (or 3% of expenditure).
- Allow the Council to maintain WHQS for current homes.
- Support the development of at least 250 new homes by 2025.
- Balance the need to keep rents affordable with making sure that homes are maintained and kept in good condition.
- Maximise revenue and expenditure efficiencies.
- Comply with the Prudential Code

Cabinet was pleased to note that provision had been made in the HRA Business Plan to fund a potential increase to 529 homes both newly built (509) and acquired (20) (subject to land and development opportunities and any planning, regulatory and environmental consents being secured) by 2026.

RESOLVED to approve the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Thirty Year Business Plan 2022-2023, as set out in the HRA Business Plan Narrative.

9.	STAR SURVEY OF POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL HOUSING TENANTS
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Cabinet noted the results of the STAR survey of the Council's housing tenants, undertaken in November 2021. The results show an improvement over the 2019 results with overall satisfaction rising from 65% to 71%, except for the overall quality of the home measure, which showed a decrease in satisfaction of 4%. Housing officers were studying the detail behind the headline data to highlight those areas where further work was needed to understand both the causes and possible solutions to the areas of work where performance could be improved.

RESOLVED to receive the report for information.

10.	COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS FROM THE COUNCIL HOUSING DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
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Cabinet received the six monthly report from community and economic benefits from the Council's Housing Development Programme. 32 units had been completed in Brecon, 7 in Sarn, and further units were due to be completed in March in Newtown, Llanidloes and Clyro. These homes would help address the rising demand across the county for affordable homes. The report also noted the appointment of local sub-contractors and the number of job and training opportunities created.

RESOLVED to note the contribution the Council's Housing Development Programme is making to Vision 2025 and the social and economic wellbeing of communities in Powys.

11.	CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING UPDATE
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Cabinet received the six monthly report from the Corporate Safeguarding Group.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

12.	DELEGATED DECISIONS
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Cabinet noted the delegated decisions taken by Portfolio Holders.

County Councillor M R Harris (Chair)