

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

CABINET EXECUTIVE

5 July 2022

REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Pete Roberts
Cabinet Member for a Learning Powys

REPORT TITLE: Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School

REPORT FOR: Decision

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The aim of this paper to seek Cabinet approval to delay implementation of the proposal to close Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School from the 31st August 2022 to the 31st August 2023.

2. Background

- 2.1 On the 8th February 2022, Cabinet considered an Objection Report in respect of a proposal to close Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School.

- 2.2 Having considered the Objection Report, Cabinet approved the following recommendation:

‘To approve the proposal to close Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School from the 31st August 2022, with pupils to attend their nearest alternative schools.’

- 2.3 However, the new Cabinet has raised concerns about the possible impact the implementation of the proposal would have on the community, as outlined in the community impact assessment carried out as part of the process.
- 2.4 It is therefore recommended that implementation of the proposal is delayed by a year to 31st August 2023 to further consider the impact on the community and to identify steps that the Council could take to mitigate the impact of closure of the school on the community. This could potentially include the transfer of the school building to the community to be utilised for community use. It would also provide an opportunity to explore the viability of establishing a Welsh-medium primary school in Dolau.

3. Advice

- 3.1 The School Organisation Code (2018) states the following in respect of implementation of proposals:

'Where a proposal has been determined by the local authority under section 53 of the 2013 Act the local authority itself may determine to delay, bring forward or abandon the proposal.'

- 3.2 It is therefore advised that the proposal to close Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School is delayed by a period of 12 months to the 31st August 2023.
- 3.3 The delay in implementation of the proposal will provide an opportunity to identify steps the Council could take to mitigate the impact of closure of the school on the community, which could include the transfer of the school building to the community to be utilised for community use. It will also provide an opportunity to explore the viability of establishing a Welsh-medium primary school in Dolau.
- 3.4 Delaying implementation would also provide additional time to make arrangements to ensure effective transition to alternative schools for pupils currently attending the school.
- 3.5 If agreed by Cabinet, stakeholders will be notified of this change in the implementation date in accordance with the requirements of the School Organisation Code.
- 3.6 The Council is also considering possible transformation of Ysgol Calon Cymru. Following Cabinet approval last year, informal engagement on these future plans, which aim to address issues with Ysgol Calon Cymru's current operating model, took place earlier this year. As outlined in the paper considered by Cabinet in June 2021, this is Phase 1 of the Ysgol Calon Cymru catchment transformation programme.
- 3.7 Phase 2 of the Ysgol Calon Cymru catchment transformation programme will focus on reviewing primary and early years provision in the area. However, this will not commence until there is a clear direction for Phase 1.

4. Resource Implications

- 4.1 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. When the proposal to close Llanfihangel Rhydithon CP school was first considered, it was estimated that the Council's revenue budget would benefit from a saving of around £59,000 per annum (£52,000 from formula funding plus £6,600 from catering cost savings). Changes in pupil numbers across all schools affected and the phasing in of a new funding formula mean that these savings estimates will have changed.
- 4.2 Due to the decision to close Llanfihangel Rhydithon CP school the individual school budget share allocated was for the period 1 April to 31

August 2022 only. The saving generated from the closure was retained within the overall Schools Delegated budget to be reinvested across all schools as part of the formula allocation. Delaying the closure of the school to 31 August 2023 means that further funding will need to be provided to the school for the additional year. Additional funding of **£76,800** will be required in the current financial year for the seven months to the 31 March 2023 (£73,000 for the delegated schools budget and £3,800 for catering). With a further **£32,300** estimated to be required in the 2023-24 financial year for the five months to 31st August 2023.

- 4.3 There is funding available this year for the £76,800 on a non-recurrent basis within the delegated school contingency budget, which is held centrally for unforeseen issues that arise during the year (including helping schools to manage the net costs of maternity cover, any required recalculations of formula funding and so on). Any balance at the end of the financial year is distributed across all schools. The £32,300 for the five months in 2023-24 will be factored into the formula for next financial year and funded from of the overall schools delegated budget. **The primary phase formula changes and school closures were expected to redistribute funding from small schools to larger primaries and to secondary phase schools. This proposal will limit the ability to move funding as originally planned.**
- 4.4 There may also be additional costs to ensure that the school building can remain operational for a further 12 months. The existing subterranean boiler room has on-going asbestos management remedial works and will require further works to maintain a safe environment to servicing and maintaining the boiler. The estimated cost of this work is £6,000. If there is further deterioration of the asbestos where it becomes unsafe, then consideration may have to be given to providing a new boiler and enclosure at ground level, estimated costs £40,000. These works would have to be funded from the Schools Major Improvements Programme 2023/24.
- 4.5 In addition, delaying implementation of the proposal would mean that there would be a delay in declaring the property surplus, and therefore a delay in realising any capital receipt following any sale of the property.
- 4.6 The Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer) notes the resource implications set out above of the recommendation to delay the closure implementation by 12 months. The use of the contingency budget to reinstate funding to Llanfihangel Rhydithon CP School will limit the ability of the schools service to manage unforeseen issues that arise during the year and carries an element of risk. The allocation required for 2023-24 will be drawn from the delegated formula budget, which will affect funding for all other schools. The Schools Major Improvement Programme is already under significant pressure, redirecting these funds if required will limit the other projects that can be delivered.

- 4.5 If agreed by Cabinet, Human Resources colleagues will work closely with the School Governors, management and staff to ensure that the appropriate employment processes are followed and that the staffing levels are retained at the most suitable level.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 Legal: the recommendations can be accepted from a legal point of view.
- 5.2 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".

6. Data Protection

- 6.1 N/A

7. Comment from local member(s)

- 7.1 Cllr Deb Edwards (Llangunllo with Norton):

'Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P School is the beating heart of the wonderful Community more widely known as Dolau, the community have literally climb mountains in their efforts to keep their School. I think it's imperative that we have long term education at this facility, to ensure that future generations are able to learn with in this Community, and take in to account the effect it will have on the community, I therefore wholehearted support any action which means the continuation of education with in this community.'

8. Impact Assessment

- 8.1 Impact assessments were considered by Cabinet at each stage of the process. These were updated at each stage to reflect the issues raised.

9. Recommendation

- To delay implementation of the proposal to close Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P School for 12 months to the 31st August 2023.
- To identify the steps that the Council could take to mitigate the impact of the closure on the community.
- To explore the viability of establishing a Welsh-medium primary school at Llanfihangel Rhydithon.

- A virement from delegated school contingency budget for £76,800 is approved to balance the budgets in this financial year. Noting in 2023-24 that the additional £32,300 requirement will be contained within the overall schools delegated budget.

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