

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD AT COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL, LLANDRINDOD WELLS, POWYS ON THURSDAY, 23 JUNE 2016

PRESENT

County Councillor W B Thomas (Chair)

County Councillors R G Brown, J H Brunt, M R Harris, S M Hayes, E A Jones, W T Jones and E A York

In attendance: County Councillors KW Curry, AW Davies, DO Evans, GM Jones, H Lewis and GIS Williams.

The Leader referred to correspondence he had received questioning his right to call the meeting and referring to the minutes of the Cabinet meeting on 15 December 2015 when the Chair of the People Scrutiny Committee had asked for the Committee to have sight of the results of consultation before the report came back to Cabinet. He advised that the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee had been informed of the meeting and that he had replied to say that he was satisfied that the report was in accordance with the Council's policies and he was therefore content for the Cabinet meeting to proceed. The Leader noted that it was a matter for the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee whether or not to call a meeting of the Committee. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that this was the case.

1.	APOLOGIES	C119- 2016
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Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor WJT Powell who was away on other Council business and from County Councillor DR Jones, Chair of the People Scrutiny Committee and County Councillor SC Davies, leader of the Labour group.

2.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	C120- 2016
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County Councillor JH Brunt advised that as a Local Authority appointed governor of a school under review he would not be taking part in the meeting.

3.	NANTMEL CHURCH IN WALES SCHOOL	C121- 2016
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The Portfolio Holder for Education presented the report which set out the results of the consultation on the proposed closure of Nantmel Church in Wales School.

County Councillor David Evans spoke as the local member to oppose the recommendation to close the school. He argued that he had not been given enough time to respond and expressed his disappointment that the meeting had been called so quickly. He argued that closing the school would not produce any savings and he referred to the Estyn inspection which judged that Nantmel was good and Rhayader adequate. He felt that no consideration had been given to the welfare of the pupils and said that the proposal was not transformational. He urged the Cabinet to await the Cabinet Secretary for Education's Rural Schools Policy.

The Portfolio Holder for Education and Head of Schools advised that there was no indication when this policy would come forward.

County Councillor Kelvyn Curry questioned the policy to close a school because it was small and therefore cost more. He referred to the Cabinet decision to allow Llanfyllin High school a further two years to use its delegated budget to transport pupils on the grounds on fairness and asked whether it was fair to close Nantmel School. He argued that the report did not take any account of the impact on community that the closure would have.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance explained that the money being spent by Llanfyllin High School was from their delegated budget whereas the savings from Nantmel was from the Council's budget. He also explained that whilst the Schools service like all Council services needed to find savings, the proposal was primarily about savings but was about providing sustainable primary education in the area.

County Councillor Aled Davies, leader of the Conservative group argued that not enough consideration had been given to the issue of standards and that it was not acceptable to move pupils from a school judged by Estyn to be good to one judged adequate.

County Councillor James Gibson-Watt, leader of the Liberal Democrat group argued that the community impact assessment should have been carried out earlier to allow for more objective decisions to be taken. He noted that the school was the only public facility in the community and that its closure would have a very detrimental effect on the community. He argued that closure should be the last resort and the Council needed to look at alternatives or rural areas would be denuded of facilities and the demographics of rural areas would change as families moved away. He asked about federation but it was explained that a Church in Wales school could only federate with another Church in Wales school.

In reply to questions raised about standards it was explained that the last Estyn inspection at Nantmel had taken place in May 2012 when the school had been judged to be good and Rhayader in January 2014 when the school was judged as adequate with Estyn monitoring. A follow up inspection in January 2015 judged Rhayader School to have made good progress and in no need of further Estyn monitoring. The schools were also assessed annually using the National Model for categorising schools and in 2015 Rhayader was assessed in the highest group for standards, group 1, and Nantmel in group 3. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that it was appropriate to take this information into account. The Head of Schools advised that the School Organisation Code 2013 required that where there is a transfer of learners to alternative provision there should normally be evidence that the alternative would deliver outcomes and offer provision at least equivalent to that currently available to those learners. The National Model for Categorisation was a national model and not a Powys model. The vertical axis in respect of standards as a data exercise carried out by Welsh Government and the standards of education at Rhayader School were judged to be as least as good as Nantmel Church in Wales School.

In answer to a question about children who lived closer to Crossgates CP School and chose to transfer there it was confirmed that if they met the admissions criteria they would be admitted. They would also qualify for free school transport if they lived further than two miles from the school.

Each Cabinet member confirmed that they had read the report and appendices. Cabinet members had also found it helpful to have visited Nantmel and Rhayader schools. The Leader acknowledged the strong support for the school that had been apparent in the consultation meeting he attended. However, maintaining small schools was not necessarily in the best interests of the pupils, particularly where there might be a single pupil in a year group. The Cabinet also noted that the authority had found it difficult to recruit teaching heads to small schools and that larger schools with non-teaching heads was a more sustainable model of primary education.

In moving the recommendation the Portfolio Holder for Education reminded Cabinet that the One Powys Plan had as one of its priorities transforming learning and skills to ensure that all children and young people are supported to achieve their full potential.

RESOLVED	Reason for Decision:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="236 723 813 831">1. to receive the Consultation Report in respect of the proposal to close Nantmel C. in W. School; <li data-bbox="236 869 813 1014">2. to approve the publication of a statutory notice in respect of closure of Nantmel C. in W. School from the 31st December 2016. 	<p data-bbox="849 723 1441 797">To provide a sustainable model of primary education</p>

County Councillor W B Thomas (Chair)