

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

**CABINET EXECUTIVE
20 December 2022**

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

REPORT TITLE: Welsh-medium provision in Dolau

REPORT FOR: Decision

1. Purpose

1.1 The aim of this paper to update Cabinet on the findings of the work undertaken to explore the viability of establishing a Welsh-medium primary school in the current Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School building in Dolau.

1.2 The report is supported by the following appendices:

Appendix A – Report to consider the viability of establishing Welsh-medium provision in Dolau

Appendix B – Questionnaire to assess the viability of establishing Welsh-medium provision in Dolau – Report of findings

Appendix C – Comments from the Welsh-medium Education Forum

2. Background

2.1 On the 8th February 2022, the previous Cabinet considered an Objection Report in respect of a proposal to close Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School and approved the closure of the school from the 31st August 2022.

2.2 On the 5th July 2022, the new Cabinet considered a further report in respect of Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School and agreed to delay implementation of the proposal to close the school for 12 months to the 31st August 2023, and to explore the viability of establishing a Welsh-medium primary school at Llanfihangel Rhydithon.

2.3 Officers have undertaken work to explore the viability of establishing Welsh-medium provision at Llanfihangel Rhydithon. This has included the following:

- Development of a report to consider the viability of establishing Welsh-medium provision in Dolau – this is attached as Appendix A

- A questionnaire for parents in the Llandrindod and Presteigne / Knighton areas, to gather their views on the possible establishment of Welsh-medium provision at Llanfihangel Rhydithon – the findings are attached as Appendix B.

A summary of the two appendices is provided below.

i) **Report to consider the viability of establishing Welsh-medium provision in Dolau**

2.4 The report includes the following:

- The Strategic Context
- An overview of current Welsh-medium provision in the area
- An overview of the current provision at Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School
- Census data relating to Welsh language skills in the area
- Identification of options which would result in establishing Welsh-medium provision in Dolau
- An assessment of the options against Critical Success Factors
- A SWOT assessment of shortlisted options
- A financial evaluation of shortlisted options

2.5 The report considers the following options which would result in the establishment of Welsh-medium provision in Dolau:

Option 1	Change the language category of Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School from English-medium to Welsh-medium on a phased basis, starting with pupils in the early years then phasing in each year as these pupils move through the school.
Option 2	Establish a new Welsh-medium school on the current site of Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School. This would mean closing Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School, opening a new Welsh-medium school starting with Foundation Phase pupils and extending the provision as these pupils move through the school.
Option 3	Establish a Welsh-medium stream at Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School to operate alongside English-medium provision.

2.6 The 3 options were assessed against a number of Critical Success Factors. Option 3 was discounted after this assessment as it did not meet any of the Critical Success Factors. Whilst options 1 and 2 also failed to meet any of the Critical Success Factors, the assessment identified that there was a possibility that they could meet some of

them, so these options were taken forward for further assessment, including a SWOT assessment and financial evaluation.

Financial Evaluation of shortlisted options

2.7 Both shortlisted options have been compared with the status quo (closing the school from 31 August 2023) and the comparative costs are set out in the table below. It should be noted that the per pupil allocations have not been included within the estimated delegated funding for either option as it is assumed that all pupils would attend a Powys school in the status quo and in both options, so those costs would remain the same (the estimated saving for school closure already takes account of this). The phasing in of the Welsh medium is assumed to start in September 2024 for both options.

2.8 The table also includes the estimated budget per pupil for each year for each option. The 2022-23 budget per pupil for Llanfihangel Rhydithon is £6,540 and the Powys average primary school budget per pupil for 2022-23 is £4,657.

	Status Quo	Option 1	Option 1	Option 2	Option 2
Financial Year	Estimated Savings from closure	Delegated Funding excl. per pupil allocation £	Budget per pupil (incl. per pupil allocation) £	Delegated Funding excl. per pupil allocation £	Budget per pupil (incl. per pupil allocation) £
2023-24	(45,200)	37,600		(41,700)	
2024-25	(77,500)	88,000	8,433	18,800	22,434
2025-26	(77,500)	112,900	8,109	82,200	13,190
2026-27	(77,500)	112,400	7,667	81,200	10,108
2027-28	(77,500)	113,200	8,596	80,300	8,334
2028-29	(77,500)	113,400	8,817	79,400	7,273
2029-30	(77,500)	78,200	6,848	78,600	6,568
2030-31	(77,500)	67,700	5,779	67,700	5,779
Total over 8 years	(587,700)	723,400		446,500	
Difference from Status Quo	N/A	1,311,100		1,034,200	
Ongoing annual savings / additional running costs	(77,500)	67,700		67,700	

2.9 Option 1 means that the school does not close at 31 August 2023 and continues to operate in English medium only from September 2023 to

August 2024. It then operates in both languages until the English medium stream is fully phased out in August 2029. For formula funding purposes, it has been assumed that the school would be funded in the same way as a dual stream school from September 2024 until 31 August 2029 (when the final year of English medium learners leave year 6). This means that both the English medium provision and the Welsh medium provision would receive top ups over and above the per pupil allocations, due to the low pupil numbers at the school. This ensures that the school receives sufficient funding to be able to deliver education in both languages during this transition period.

2.10 Option 2 means that that the current school would close on 31 August 2023 and remain closed for one academic year. There would therefore be an estimated saving of £77,500 split over 2 financial years (£45,200 in 2023-24 and £32,300 in 2024-25). Option 2 then assumes a new WM school would start in September 2024 with 5 learners¹ in Reception which is estimated to cost £42,600 for the two terms in the 2024-25 financial year. £6,000 has been added to the costs for the academic year that the school is empty, to allow for any incidental costs of mothballing the school building for 12 months. The school would be a single medium school so would only receive the small school top up (£70,000 per year until over 30 pupils when it changes to £60,000) plus the £3,000 per year bilingual administration top up.

2.11 Following the further assessments carried out, the report concludes that Options 1 and 2 are not viable. The reasons for discounting these two options are as follows:

Option	Reasons for discounting
<p>Option 1:</p> <p>Change the school's language category from English-medium to Welsh-medium on a phased basis, starting with pupils in the early years then phasing in each year as these pupils move through the school</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There would be an additional cost to the Council of £1,311,100 over 8 years compared with the Status Quo - The capacity of the current building means that the school would continue to be a small school, with limited ability to grow its numbers without additional capital investment - Changing the current school's language category would mean that the school would continue to be run by the same governing body and staff who do not have experience of delivering Welsh-medium education - Does not meet the aspiration of the Council's WESP to develop new Welsh-medium provision in Powys' main centres

¹ 5 learners is the average intake for a 36-place pupil school

	of population in order to stimulate demand.
<p>Option 2:</p> <p>Establish a new Welsh-medium school on the current site of Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There would be an additional cost to the Council of £1,034,200 over 8 years compared with the Status Quo - As the new provision would be phased in, the school would initially be operating with very small numbers of pupils - The capacity of the current building means that the school would continue to be a small school, with limited ability to grow its numbers without additional capital investment - Does not meet the aspiration of the Council's WESP to develop new Welsh-medium provision in Powys' main centres of population in order to stimulate demand.

ii) **Questionnaire to assess the viability of establishing Welsh-medium provision in Dolau**

- 2.12 Between the 29th September 2022 and the 10th November 2022, the Council carried out an engagement exercise to understand the views of parents in the area about the possibility of establishing Welsh-medium provision in Dolau.
- 2.13 An online questionnaire was developed and circulated to parents and prospective parents in the Llandrindod, Presteigne and Knighton areas via schools and early years providers in the area. Information about the questionnaire was also shared in the local press and on the Council's social media platforms.
- 2.14 224 responses were received to the online questionnaire, as well as 4 other written responses.
- 2.15 A report has been produced which summarises the findings. This is attached as Appendix B.
- 2.16 98 of the respondents (45.6%) indicated that they would be interested in their children attending Welsh-medium provision in Dolau if this provision was available.
- 2.17 Comments were also received which indicated support for this. These included the following:
- Dolau would be a suitable site for Welsh-medium provision as there is already a Cylch Meithrin and Ti a Fi

- This would provide the option of a rural Welsh-medium school which is not currently available in the area

2.18 However, whilst the findings show some support to the idea of establishing Welsh-medium provision in Dolau, a number of concerns are also raised. These include the following:

- The Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School building is not suitable
- Concern about staffing arrangements
- Concern about the cost of establishing this provision given the current financial climate
- Welsh-medium provision should be offered in a more central location e.g. larger towns
- Welsh-medium education is already available in the Llandrindod area at the Welsh-medium streams at Ysgol Trefonnen and Rhayader C. in W. School
- Concern that there would be insufficient demand for this provision in Dolau

3. Advice

3.1 Based on the findings of the report to assess the viability of establishing Welsh-medium provision in Dolau and the findings of the questionnaire to assess the viability of establishing Welsh-medium provision in Dolau, the advice of officers is that establishing Welsh-medium provision in Dolau is not viable.

3.2 The reasons for this are as follows:

- Establishing Welsh-medium provision in Dolau would not meet the aspiration of the Council's WESP to develop new Welsh-medium provision in Powys' main centres of population in order to stimulate demand.
- The capacity of the current building means that the school would continue to be a small school, with no ability to grow its numbers without additional capital investment
- The two shortlisted options would result in an additional cost to the Council of between £1,034,200 and £1,311,100 over 8 years compared with the Status Quo
- The school would continue to have low pupil numbers, high budget share per pupil and teaching would take place in combined aged classes due to the low pupil numbers
- Attracting and recruiting staff who have the proficiency to teach in Welsh may be difficult based on evidence from other schools in the county
- High-quality Welsh-medium provision is available locally at Ysgol Trefonnen and Rhayader C.i.W Primary School with places available at both schools, transport would be provided for parents wishing to access Welsh-medium provision for their children in accordance with the Home-to-School Transport Policy.

- 3.2 It is therefore advised that the Council does not proceed with establishing Welsh-medium provision in Dolau. This would mean that Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School would close on the 31st August 2023, as agreed by Cabinet on the 5th July 2022.
- 3.3 The paper considered by Cabinet on the 5th July 2022 also included a commitment to 'identify steps that the Council could take to mitigate the impact of the closure on the community.' This will be considered as part of the Council's activity to close down the school building.

4. Resource Implications

- 4.1 The annual cost of implementing Option 1 or 2 compared to the status quo is £145,200 per annum once either option is fully implemented as implementation would mean foregoing the estimated saving of £77,500 as well as the estimated annual cost of £67,700 of the options. As the report concludes that options 1 and 2 are not viable proposals, Llanfihangel Rhydithon CP School will close on 31 August 2023 and the authority will realise the estimated savings of £45,200 in 2023-24 and £32,300 in 2024-25 (total ongoing annual saving of £77,500).
- 4.2 It should be noted that the school's projected cumulative budget position will change from a surplus of £15,748 at 31 March 2022 to an anticipated deficit of £14,663 by 31 August 2023 which will need to be written off on closure. The authority is working with the school to eliminate or minimise any deficit balance.

School	Actual Outturn Cumulative surplus at 31 March 2022	22/23 In year under / (over) spend	22/23 Projected Cumulative Cfwd 31 March 2023	23/24 In year under / (over) spend	23/24 Projected Cumulative Cfwd 31 August 2023
Llanfihangel Rhydithon C P School	15,748	(15,200)	548	(15,211)	(14,663)

- 4.3 The Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer) notes the content of the report. The original decision to close the school would realise an ongoing revenue saving of £77,500 per annum which would be redistributed within the Schools Funding Formula across other Powys Schools. Both of the options considered would require additional funding as set out in the report, this funding would create an additional pressure on the Council budget or would have to be accommodated within the Schools Delegated budget reducing what is available for other schools. I note the conclusion that the establishment of Welsh Medium Provision at this school is not financially viable and can support the recommendations.

- 4.4 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.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 Legal: The recommendations are acceptable from a legal point of view
- 5.2 The Head of Legal Services and 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):

‘As a newly elected County Council member for the ward including Llanfihangel Rhydithon CP school, I am extremely disappointed with the decision of the portfolio holder/cabinet to re-commence with decision of closure of this school for the 3rd time in 6 years, especially given the saving and maintaining current schools was apparently such a large part of the Liberal Democrats campaign! I wonder how much thought has been or will be given to the mental well being of these children, their parents, and the larger community, for which this school is the beating heart?

Clearly the proposal for Welsh medium learning at Llanfihangel Rhydithon CP school, a Senedd initiative, as well as that of the present cabinet, seems, in this case, to have been little more than a smoke and mirrors campaign to appear to show some sort of due diligence whilst following the previous cabinets decision to close. The on line poll (Questionnaire) used as one of the tools to “help” with this decision has had many complaints from East Radnorshire and surrounding areas for being ‘tech heavy’ and not designed to get a measured response especially from the current non Welsh Speaking areas of the communities, surely the very people it should be targeting given the Senedd Cymraeg 2050 of 1 million Welsh speakers is well behind target, and recent statistics show that Powys has had a dramatic reduction of 25% less residents who can speak Welsh. There is a need to engage EVERYONE in these areas if these targets are real? The main thrust behind the decision seems to be that there are other local schools offering this facility. Given that the nearest of these schools is an extra hour daily travel from Llanfihangel Rhydithon area, and even further for most of the rest of East Radnorshire scholars, the campaign seems to be less inclusive when it needs to be the opposite if wishing to come anywhere near achieving target

Given the portfolio holders response to Cllr. Iain McIntosh's question on 21st November which was "As I have already proposed a very different approach to Transformation than that which was carried out by the previous administration, I am expecting officers to review schools on a catchment area basis, where local factors can be considered early on, along with earlier engagement with communities. **As each catchment area is unique. It is not possible to pre-determine the outcome of any review**" I am therefore shocked and surprised by this decision which would appear to be in direct contravention of the statement only three weeks later? It is also my understanding that if Llanfihangel Rhydithon CP (or any other) were to be closed the alternatively proposed school, in this case Crossgates, should offer an education level of the same or better than the proposed school closure, based on the most recent Estyn reports available, this does not appear to be so in this case.

There are certainly areas that Cllr. Pete Roberts assessment of the school, Chair of governors, School and other members of the community would wish to engage with, not least the predicted costs and ability for expansion, it is to be hoped they will be given the chance before any final decision is taken, communication has certainly been sparse over the last 6 months.

All in all this is felt to be a very poor response from the portfolio holder, giving nothing more than false hope to the community who have campaigned over many years for this school which is very much at it's heart. I, and I am sure the community as a whole feel they have every right to expect much better treatment from the Elected Council, I will certainly ask questions of Cabinet as well as whole heartedly supporting the communities continued opposition to this recommendation.

Stronger, Fairer, Greener.....Ummm.'

8. Impact Assessment

- 8.1 Impact assessments were considered by Cabinet at each stage of the process to close Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School. These were updated at each stage to reflect the issues raised.

9. Recommendation

- To note the officer advice that establishment of Welsh-medium provision in Dolau is not viable.
- To implement the decision made by the previous Cabinet to close Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School from the 31st August 2023 as circumstances have not altered since the decision of the former Cabinet on 8th February 2022, such that implementation would be "inappropriate altogether".

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CABINET REPORT NEW TEMPLATE VERSION 3